

Just Enough to Kill a Man

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/55462636) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/55462636>.

Rating:

Mature

Archive Warning:

Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Categories:

Gen, F/M

Fandom:

Naruto (Anime & Manga)

Relationships:

Sannin Ensemble & Sarutobi Hiruzen, Nara Shikaku/Original Female Character(s)

Characters:

Orochimaru (Naruto), Jiraiya (Naruto), Tsunade (Naruto), Original Female Character(s), Namikaze Minato, Nara Shikaku, Nawaki (Naruto), Original Hyuuga Character(s) (Naruto), Uchiha Fugaku, Yamanaka Inoichi, Akimichi Chouza, Sarutobi Hiruzen

Additional Tags:

Third Shinobi War (Naruto), Poison, Jounin Sensei Orochimaru (Naruto), Protective Orochimaru (Naruto), Good Orochimaru (Naruto), Hokage Orochimaru (Naruto), at some point, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Not Canon Compliant, Mystery, Intrigue, Snakes, Isekai OC, Reincarnation, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Infant Death, Stillbirth, Human Experimentation, Medical Experimentation, Dead Dove: Do Not Eat

Language:

English

Series:

Part 2 of [Venom and Other Anecdotes](#)

Stats:

Published: 2024-04-25 Completed: 2025-01-03 Words: 61,299
Chapters: 25/25

Just Enough to Kill a Man

by [xo_QueenieVee_xo](#)

Summary

For a moment she is no longer the jounin medic, prodigious poison master of her gen, she is just four year old Tsuyuko watching everyone in her home village succumb to plague. Dying for the sake of death. An utterly pointless fate.

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Venomous part 2

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

The same as before, immunity's toll

The third shinobi war starts on a bright day, midsummer, only three years after the official end of the second shinobi. Orochimaru's genin team, now a trio of chunin, are among the second wave of leaf shinobi sent to fight. Tsuyuko, having received an accreditation as a poison master and capable medic, is assigned to the med tent for duty. Her teammates are given various jobs around the camp and assigned out to other teams for patrol, it is after all the nature of their rank.

Tsuyuko despises their assignments. Especially some two weeks in when the jounin medic is killed in action and the senior most medic position now belongs to her. She may have been well equipped for the role, but it did not mean the young teen was by any means excited by the prospect.

Being the senior most medic meant she had to deal with priority patients that tended to be high up members of their camps chain of command, or the heavy hitter squads like Hatake's genin team that now all ranked special jounin. Or even worse the few mostly Uchiha teams who were stationed here, not that she has anything against them, it was just that they were ever so prickly to deal with. She lacked Orochimaru's nack for it, which apparently only Nawaki inherited from their teacher. Himura just ignored them so he was absolutely no help.

But what's even worse than full Uchiha teams, is teams that had Inuzuka clan members on them. Dealing with injured teams when one of their teammates is as pack oriented as an Inuzuka is absolutely the bane of her existence. While she understands the fear and worry, she also can not deal with how often they get in the way. Hindering healing in the face of trying to protect.

Tsuyuko near hisses at the scruffy jounin peering down at her while she tries to perform an eye exam on Uchiha Fugaku. Whom she doesn't find to be a problem and would really like to not offend. That being said, his teammate has really pushed her buttons and she is done trying to work around him. Finally she stops, reaching over to the clean bowl of water next to her and flicking it in the Inuzuka man's face.

"Back the fuck up." *Or I will make you.* She hopes he hears her unspoken warning loud and clear.

“What the hell type of medic are you?” He grumbles wincing as he reaches for the hem of his shirt to wipe the water away.

“I never said I was a medic.” She grumbles, she’s a certified field doctor not a medic or med nin- which while similar was not quite the same.

“Then what the hell are you?!” The jounin demands, rough and gruff, Tsuyuko deadpans in the face of his aggression.

“A poison master who is trained in field medicine and iryo ninjutsu. Any other questions or are you going to let me do my job?” She tries not to patronize, to talk down to, but her nerves are already frayed thin and Fugaku’s squad is one of the last she has to see before going on break.

“Yea one more question, who authorized this?” His question has their third teammate wincing and her grimacing horribly.

“The death of Masaigi authorized this.” Tsuyuko mumbles bitterly to herself. Knowing good and well they both will hear her no problem. Fugaku must take pity on her because he sighs loudly drawing his teammates attention..

“Leave her alone Kugo.” Of course Fugaku’s guard dog does not stand down. Tsuyuko huffs.

“You heard him, now go let Itoka set your collarbone you fucking moron.” Itoka pops their head around the curtain, the short woman takes one look at the wincing Inuzuka man and sighs. In a swift motion she has his ear between her fingers and is pulling him out of Tsuyuko’s med bay. Neither Fugaku or their other squadmate attempt to stop it.

“Your teammate’s an idiot Uchiha-san.” Tsuyuko grumbles, finally able to continue the examination.

“I’m aware. But he means well, and you do come off strong.” Fugaku sounds almost as done as she feels by the whole thing. The third squadmate only snorts, apparently they are a man of little words. Tsuyuko pulls her hands away from Fugaku’s face, grabbing her notebook to quickly write up the results. She motions for him to sit back up, to which the Uchiha heir complies without complaint.

No sign of dizziness or temporary blindness. Just as she assumed based on the results of the diagnostic she ran. He’s clear to continue

combat, but she'll suggest eye drops. Like she did for most doujutsu users. Himura had horrible dry eyes, one that required a prescription.

"I have to, otherwise people don't take me seriously because of my age. Your eyes are fine, if dry, I'll write you a prescription for drops that you can keep on you. I would suggest taking it easy tonight." She scribbles the order down and hands the paper over to him. Fugaku nods

"Our patrol is done for the evening, I will be sure to rest." He tells her cordially.

"Good. Anything else I need to look at?" She slips back into clinical professionalism for a moment, glancing over at the third squadmate who offers her a simple thumbs up.

"That was it."

"Alright then, take this over to Makami, and then get out of the med tent and make sure you take your dog with you." She quips, again she appreciates an Inuzuka's knack for teamwork. She does not appreciate their helicopter tendencies and does not want that lingering in the med tent. Fugaku nods, the third squadmate snorts once more.

At least the barb is met with a lightheart.

"Have a good evening Yasha-sensei." Fugaku is polite, but she catches a glimpse of something almost teasing. Tsuyuko huffs.

"Fuck off Uchiha." She waves them away while resetting the bay for the next set of patients.

Dusk falls by the time she can leave the med tent, Tsuyuko makes a b-line for her own teammates and the ino-shika-cho trio. Someone among them will have saved her food. At least she hopes. Tsuyuko plops down next to Nawaki, Himura hands her a rice ball reaching over Nawaki's lap to do so. She takes the offering graciously. Nawaki isn't the least bit phased, maintaining his conversation with Choza about... potatoes easily. She's not going to ask.

"You okay over there?" Shikaku is the one who asks, she can hear the concern and possible exasperation on her face. She however does not look up to confirm it.

“Just dandy.” Mumbling before taking a bit out of the rice ball. It’s dry, that fact alone kills her appetite.

“Are you sure? You look terrible.” Tsuyuko does however look up to glare a dagger through her third favorite blonde’s head. Bold words from someone covered in dirt and grime, at least she was still decently clean. If they weren’t in the middle of a war she’d leap over the fire to wipe the smug look from his face, for now she settles for giving him the middle finger.

“Fuck off Inoichi. You don’t look like hot shit either.” She kindly points out, to which he glares back with an indignant huff.

“We just returned from patrol, what’s your excuse?” He barbs. Tsuyuko decides then and there she owes him nothing.

“I don’t have to explain myself to you. Shikaku, injury report?” She turns her attention to Shikaku, he blinks ever so slowly at her before sighing.

“We’re all fine, eat the rice ball woman.” He replies, waving off her concern. Tsuyuko considers the three of them for a moment, completely ignoring the dry rice ball in her hands.

“Hey, what did you do to Kugo?” Nawaki suddenly asks, drawing her attention from the trio. She turns to her teammate and shrugs, finding that he has a water canister held out for her. Tsuyuko takes it with a nod sipping at the canister before answering his question.

“I flicked water in his face when he wouldn’t stop hovering.” And if they were hearing anything else then someone is a liar because that was all she did.

“Nice.” Himura offers a small snicker and a thumbs up.

“I thought so.” She grins back, failing to ignore Inoichi’s sigh again.

“You have to stop terrorizing the other squads.” He repremends as if she were a child, Tsuyuko once more finds herself glaring at him. She’s not a child and she will not be talked to like one.

“Then they need to stop underestimating me.” Maybe she’s too short, too bitter in sound, because it instantly has Nawaki interceding.

“Oh, you got mail today.” Said mail is promptly shoved in her face blocking the glare from further taking place. But not placed in her

hands, Tsuyuko turns, giving Nawaki the utter most droll look she can. She doesn't try to take the letter he's holding above her head.

"Nice change of subject Nawa."

"Do you want your mail or not?" He teases pulling the mail back.

"Gimme." Tsuyuko snatches the mail from his hands, playfully shoves his shoulder in retaliation. She opens the scroll and begins reading a moment later, the rice ball shoved to the side.

"Who's it from?" Someone asks, she's not paying too much attention as to who now, more focused on the contents of the letter.

"Biwako-sama. She's keeping me updated on Kakashi." She mumbles, not truly committed to the answer. Of course this is a horrible choice because it for whatever reason ruffles Inoichi's already prickly feathers.

"Oh.." He sounds ever so... she actually doesn't know. Could be disappointment, or something else. Regardless it meant she wasn't going to be able to read her mail here. Tsuyuko closes the scroll back and tucks it into her pouch before pivoting her attention to the Yamanaka.

"Spit it out Inoichi."

"Why, why not sensei or Suyuri-san? Also why is the hokage's wife even doing that for you?" He rapid fire answers. Shikaku sighs, while Nawaki tenses next to her. Tsuyuko shrugs.

"Asuma and Kakashi are friends of sorts, and I'd rather not exchange letters with Suyuri-san." She feels like the latter is self explanatory. Hatake's team were informed of her biological relationship to Suyuri, as the results of their tutelage. So they really shouldn't have to ask.

Of course Inoichi was of the belief that she should just let it go, forgive Suyuri for what she did and move on. Except as a result of her abandonment she watched her entire village die. People she'd loved and cared about, friends that never got to grow older, lives lost for senseless destruction. Trauma that will never truly heal. Blood stained pavement, marred bodies, and the smell of burning decay that is forever ingrained into her memory.

Nawaki's hand on her shoulder pulls her out of her head, Tsuyuko nods a small thanks. She blinks away the tears that started to form.

Crying about the dead won't bring them back. Inoichi must not notice her lapse because he continues.

"And sensei? What did sensei do to you?" He demands, almost offended by the idea. Tsuyuko rolls her eyes. She had no true issue with Hatake, not really. Not when he was the one who usually oversaw her visits with Kakashi.

"Nothing, there was just no reason to ask since he's stationed on another front. Besides Biwako-sama and I already exchange letters regularly so the updates on my baby brother aren't a big deal." She shrugs feeling completely done with the conversation and whatever crawled up Inoichi's butt and died this morning. He was not this prickly at breakfast.

"Mahh, drop it Ino. Tsuyuko isn't a patient that needs you to psychoanalyze her motives." Shikaku cuts Inoichi off from further questioning her. To which she is entirely thankful for and smiles kindly at him to hopefully show her gratitude.

"Besides, Tsuyu's brain is a nest of snakes. Do you really want to analyze that?" Nawaki's grip on her shoulder doesn't waver as he teases. She reaches over and pinches his side. The diversion is appreciated because it knocks everything off course.

"I suppose not."

Quiet befalls the group, Tsuyuko eats the remainder of her food before excusing herself. When she's gone, Nawaki and Himura both leave soon after following their teammate . Leaving the Ino-Shika-CHo trio alone.

"She really does look terrible. I don't think she's eating enough." Choza mumbles, not at all pleased by the notion.

The rice ball she'd been given sits forgotten across from them.

Tsuyuko is rudely woken from sleep not even a full hour into the cycle. Every ounce of exhaustion leaves her bones when she sees the look on Uchiha Fugaku's face. Even in the dark of night light by a sole lantern the horror stricken dread is clear as day. That's a dreadful look if she's ever seen one.

“What’s happened?” She stands, slipping her shoes on and grabbing her med pack while throwing something at Nawaki to rouse him. Himura is standing near the door so he must have just finished his last round. She has no idea if it needs all three of them, but she’d rather have her teammates ready just in case.

“Kugo is coughing up blood, and there is a rash on his hands.” A picture begins to build in her stomach. Those two symptoms... She hopes she’s wrong.

“Alright. Nawaki, head to the med tent and tell whoever is on call to set up an isolation box.” Because if she’s not... Well, the entire camp is in serious danger.

“You got it.” He’s out first, on full kilt towards the med tent. Tsuyuko prays they won’t need such measures as an isolation box.

“Uchiha-san please lead the way to your teammate.” She turns back to Fugaku, he nods crisply.

“At once, follow me.” He motions for her to follow, she does, Himura hot on her heels. Tsuyuko’s entire stomach feels like it has sunk into a pit. Apprehension crawls at her skin, anxiety swells in her chest.

For once in her life she wants to be wrong.

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The Inuzuka man is bent over a bowl, blood dripping down his chin and staining his hands. His blood does nothing to hide the spotted rash climbing up his wrists now. Tsuyuko heaves herself into immediate action, kneeling to meet the jounin on the ground. She doesn’t bother to wipe the blood off his chin as she starts the assessment, it serves no purpose to. Temp, blood pressure, heart rate, blood sample all are collected in stark silence. There is a weight in her chest that will not leave, she dares not to breathe as she waits for the results of each test. As if her breathing will change the results. The sannin’s apprentice is unnervingly quiet until she isn’t. She’s seen these symptoms before.

She’s painfully familiar with these symptoms.

“Fuck.. no, no, no. Bastard. Sage dammit.” She curses, before turning sharply to bark the next order.

“I need a barrier around this tent at once, no one else is to come in or

out and unfortunately no one here can leave. I know these symptoms far too well, these are the same things from Hirofu.” The tent goes deathly still, much like a long lost sea side village had once upon a time.

“Are you certain?” The demand is but whispered, Tsuyuko meets Fugaku’s hard stare dead on.

“Yes. We need to act quickly, barrier up now.” She reminds, a not so gentle order. They have to act fast. Time is already against them, she sets the internal clock.

“Alright. From now on we will do exactly everything Yasha-sensei asks.” Fugaku directs his words to the other people in the tent. Tsuyuko takes a deep breath, she pulls the only vial of penicillin out of her small pack. The isolation pack will have more, but for now this is what she has.

This is the only thing she can do to try and slow this down. To stop the spread in its wake. To prevent a mass casualty from happening within their camp.

“I’ll send a snake to sensei for antibiotics that are more equipped to deal with this. But for now something is better than nothing. Forgive me but this is going to sting.”

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Tsuyuko heaves a tired sigh as she closes the tent flap behind her, it's been hours of nonstop iryo-ninjutsu use and she's exhausted. But there isn't any time to rest and recover now. She pops a soldier pill and downs a canister of water.

“How is he?” Fugaku approaches cautiously, Tsuyuko caps the now empty canister before looking at him. He looks as tired as she feels. Meaning they both probably look like absolute dung. She offers him the most reassuring look she can.

His teammate is battling a life threatening disease, one that notoriously wiped an entire village off the face of the earth leaving one sole survivor. While he isn't out of the woods, Tsuyuko is cautiously hopeful for his recovery. She has to be, because otherwise his death is secured and she does not want more blood on her hands as a result of this fucking strain.

“I’ve got his stomach to settle for now, a savant on the rash to keep

the swelling down, and will administer antibiotics in the next hour, he's asleep now- please let him rest." She's clinical, more clinical than her nature, adopting more of how Orochimaru was when she first met him. But familiarity will offer neither of them comfort and right now the best course is to deal in facts.

He's doing better, not fine or recovered, but better than he could be. Better than what she's seen at this stage before. She's more hopeful than she should be, she wants to be proved wrong.

She wants this strain to not be as bad as it was. To not be the same. Tsuyuko would loathe to see them die. Not like this. Never like this. Death brought about this way was just cruel.

"Of course. Yasha-sensei.." Fugaku trails, almost like he wants to ask a question but isn't quite sure how.

"Yea?"

"What can you tell us about this ailment? You said it was the same as before." He asks carefully, perhaps he can see how hard this is hitting her. Or maybe he's just always this careful. Tsuyuko hums.

"Yes, I did. The disease isn't named, but its symptoms are always the same. The rash, the blood, fever, typically starts with a headache. It's fast acting. It raged through Hirofu in a matter of a week leaving everyone dead." She can't mince her words or hide the truth. This disease is deadly, and they need to prepare for that.

Prepare for carnage, but hope for recovery.

"How is it contacted?" Here she bites her lip, a memory slinking forward.

Hirofu was fine before that cargo boat arrived. Shinobi returning home, they said, needed a port and to stay a night before heading back to Konoha. They made a meal for the family that offered their home, then left before morning light. The family's daughter, a girl no older than five, was the first to die. Mimi. She'd been Tsuyuko's best friend.

She digs her nails into her arm, sharp pain to pull her out of that. Mimi's horribly sunk in face is not one she wants to see now. There was nothing she could do for the dead.

"Airborn after initial infection. But it first has to be ingested. The

disease isn't.... It's not natural." She tells Fugaku, she knows that he is trustworthy. Knows that he will be able to put together what she won't say. What she perhaps shouldn't say.

"Are you suggesting what I suspect you are?" He whispers, stepping in a bit closer to keep this conversation to their ears only. They may be behind a barrier but walls have ears and it's not worth the risk.

This information getting out... would cause a riot. Which at a time like this is not what they need. Realistically she probably shouldn't tell him what she knows, but someone other than her needs to know. Someone who has the authority to act if that need ever arose.

"Yes. Your teammate was poisoned. If I were a betting woman I'd wager the intent was to wipe out all the future clan heirs. But, that's merely conjecture." She tells him seriously.

"Who would do something like this? It seems far too sophisticated for Iwa." Fugaku mutters. Tsuyuko hums once again.

"Iwa doesn't have any notable poison masters in their current arsenal." Meaning she knows Kugo was poisoned, knows it wasn't Iwa, but she doesn't know who did it and until she knew not to go around saying anything about it. Because someone in their camp is a traitor and she didn't want them to know they were caught.

"You know something you aren't sharing." Fugaku's brow raises, then settles as he must realize why. She glances away, not outright denying his words, a frown tugging at the corners of her mouth.

It appears they have not stopped the spread fast enough.

"Perhaps, I will share, but right now it looks like we have another man down." She gestures over to where Himura is carrying another shinobi into the barrier.

"Damn." The Uchiha heir grumbles. A sentiment she widely agrees with.

"Tell me about it. You're very lucky you were vaccinated against this disease." Tsuyuko tucks her empty water canister away, she'll be needed soon.

"You as well. We'd be screwed if it could get you." Her immunity is no secret, the price she paid to achieve it would follow her to her grave. Tsuyuko shakes her head.

“I wouldn’t call it luck. Just recompense for the horror I’ve already lived through. Immunity has its own toll.” Fugaku winces at her response.

“Apologies.” He’s sincere, she doesn’t hold it against him. Most would note the advantage she has at this moment. The horror wouldn’t even occur to them for consideration.

“It’s okay. I’ve got to get back in the tent. Bring them over here!”

“Himura.”

“Hmm?”

“Are you sure?”

“I am.”

“Okay.”

“Tsuyuko.”

“Yes?”

“It’s going to be okay.”

What happens to traitors on the battlefield...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Orochimaru is sitting in the middle of a very boring meeting to the left of Hiruzen-sensei when a small snake pops into existence on top of the few manila folders sitting in front of him wrapped around a scroll. It's not one of his own, he notes immediately, all of his summons tended to favor cool toned scales and muted patterns if they had any. This snake is bright copper, with yellow speckles across its small body, eyes a vivid amber. Carefully he unwinds the snake from the scroll. He picks the pathetic little thing up with ease, it winds happily around his arm. The scroll is opened a second later, and dropped as soon as he's read the first three lines.

"Is she certain?" He questions the snake.

"Yessss. Mistress was quite distressed, ssaaaaid come here at once. Needsss medicine." The snake speaks, bobbing its head as it talks.

"Orochimaru?" Hiruzen-sensei addresses him a moment later, eyeing the snake curiously. Orochimaru brings the creature to his shoulder knowing that Tsuyuko's summons preferred pearching there, he doesn't answer Hiuzen-sensei immediately, not when his entire core is filled with urgency. He doesn't bother to excuse himself from the room before reverse summoning himself to the storage lab, taking his daughter's scroll with him.

Getting the proper equipment and counter medicines to her are far more important than the small council's meeting on wartime budget. When he agreed to take over for the third after this war he did not expect that it would bench him for much of the first round fighting. He should be out there, protecting his students, aiding in battlefield advancements. Instead he's been trapped in meetings and now that absolute worst case scenario has occurred. His students need him and he isn't there to help them.

Regardless, they are not small children anymore, and capable chunin in their own right.

He collects the vials Tsuyuko has requested, sending a few more than asked for as well as anything else they can spare. On top of the fact

that this was a highly contagious disease, the fact that it hit the camp with the most clan heirs does not go unnoticed. The camp with his students. Orochimaru isn't a betting man, but if he were, he'd put good money on who was responsible for this.

The disease that wiped Hirofu off the map was not of natural occurrence. As it stood the only people who had access to this horror were himself and he'd checked his stores; they were untouched, so that really only left one other option. The person who utilized it originally.

He scoffs, anger filling his bones. Bastard. That utter bastard. How dare he put his daughter in this position again! Orochimaru lets his anger fuel him, he finishes collecting everything that Tsuyuko might need to deal with this disease on the fronts. They are stored with care in a storage seal and sent on their way.

"You really shouldn't dismiss yourself like that, Orochimaru." No sooner is the snake gone does Hiruzen-sensei appear. Orochimaru sighs.

"It was an urgent matter."

"Oh?" Hiruzen utters with a raised brow, only then does Orochimaru hand over the scroll from his student to his teacher.

The Sandaime is quiet as he reads the report. He makes no show of emotion as he looks up to regard his student. "You made the right call, let's keep this to ourselves for now. Fear won't do the village any good."

"Agreed, for now."

"Trust your student Orochimaru, she is well equipped to deal with this."

The one thing she'd never enjoyed as a doctor was the feeling of holding someone's life in her hands. She became a doctor to help people, but the weight of life, it was an awful one to bear. It was more akin to a noose around one's neck. It was never the part of medicine she enjoyed. The weight of human life. As a trained medic, iryo-ninjutsu made that awful feeling so much harder to bear. To actually feel a patient's lifeforce, to literally hold their life in your hands under

a glowing green hue. Anytime she had to be this intimate with a patient was just awful in every way, to be solely responsible for their survival. If she didn't care so much about her own friends' survival she'd want no part of this life at all.

She'd always been too sensitive to things like this.

They're up to five patients now, none any better than they were hours prior. Each patient has been set up in a tent by themselves, a precaution that they must take even if they don't necessarily have the tents to spare. If they were to start dropping like flies it would be bad for morale, and if they could see the various stages they might face well she didn't think that would go over well. Fear had no place in medicine. Currently she's the only medic treating these patients, which means long rounds and never ending work. Tsuyuko was back in the Inuzuka man's tent now for a long treatment. Kugo was past throwing up blood stage and should be on the mend but the headache has gone past normal pain medication. Leaving the jounin unable to move. She keeps the jounin's head steady in her lap as she works silently to heal the rising inflammation in his skull. His eyes are closed but she can see him squinting even still. Squirming under the pain. A pain she is all too well acquainted with.

His canine partner whimpers next to her, having pushed their way into her leg when she'd sat not too long ago. Tsuyuko hums, concentrating on her work, trying to prevent a brain bleed or aneurysm. Each one a possibility that came with this terrible sickness. She can't afford to lose focus to comfort the giant dog, even if she would like to. Her snakes would be just as alarmed as this poor creature, she'd want someone to offer them comfort too.

"Nala." Kugo mumbles, his voice gritting and hoarse. Tsuyuko makes a mental note to get him water after she's done. The dog whimpers again, inching forward to nuzzle her nose into his shoulder. Surprisingly Kugo reaches up, weak limbed and clumsy, to place a scared hand on Nala's snout.

"M'kay." He mutters, Tsuyuko who is holding his lifeforce in her hand would disagree but she will keep that to herself. There is no harm letting a man comfort his dog.

The tent flap opens slowly, she glances up to see what's happened now. It's merely Himura. Her teammates and Fugaku are among the few in camp who've been vaccinated against this strain. Meaning they were among the few who could be around those afflicted without

serious harm or threat to one's self.

“What is it?” She questions, keeping her voice low. Tsuyuko finds she does not like the look on her teammates face.

“You’re not going to like it.” He warns before fitting a mask over his face so he can approach her. Regardless of vaccination they should still be cautious. She thinks his warning is weak, she likes very little these days. Tsuyuko motions for him to continue.

“Spit it out Himura.”

“I discovered our culprit.” He tells her sullenly not bothering to mince his words. Well then.

“Do they know you know?”

“No.”

Tsuyuko lets the information sit. She considers the objective. Heal the sick, and find the traitor. Her greater task is still at large but it seems her teammate is still highly competent in her absence. Himura was an excellent choice for recon and espionage on their team. He was made for this type of work, of course the make-up of their genin team is why it ended up not being a chunin squad but she can’t be too mad about it since their skills just worked out that way. They still worked together as a team for the most part, but they were also easy to place with others when the need arrived.

“Okay, okay.. Don’t do anything yet.” *Don’t tell anyone.* She replies when it's clear she has to say something. Tsuyuko finishes the round of treatment on Kugo’s head, but she doesn’t get up just yet.

The jounin is awake, he’s quiet but alert. Eyes half opened a curiosity that will be hard to deny.

“I think perhaps I should, considering it was his own teammate who poisoned him.” Himura says anyway, blunt and to the point. Tsuyuko sighs.

She’d been afraid of that. But it was the only thing that made sense. The Inuzuka’s were notorious for only eating things prepared by their squadmates out in the field and they’d never make deals with people like Shimura. And, if she remembered correctly Fugaku and Kugo originally had a different third team member, an Aburame woman who’s hive was recently damaged. Tsuyuko doesn’t stop Kugo when he

forces himself to sit up, she wishes he wouldn't but in the face of this revelation how can he not.

"Are you certain?" Kugo demands, voice still hoarse, only then does Tsuyuko move just to fetch water for the young adult.

"Unfortunately. I am sorry."

"Damn..." He grumbles, Tsuyuko kneels next to him offering him a small cup of water.

"Kugo-san, drink please. Himura, go get Fugaku and tell him I have an update on Kugo." Kugo grunts as she speaks, but he takes the cup and gingerly sips at it.

"Understood." Himura half bows, stepping back out of the tent. Tsuyuko would very much like to slam her face into a wall. Or a tree given the lack of solid walls on the battlefield.

"I'm feeling better, thank you." Kugo tries to tell her, wincing still as he speaks, chest heaving harder than it should to simply speak. Tsuyuko raises her brow but doesn't mention those facts.

"Good, I want to say you'll be back on your feet in a few days. But I'm not making any promises. I want to keep an eye on you, your lungs are still a concern." She informs him plainly. Kugo groans but nods.

The two sit there in silence, Tsuyuko considers the jounin for a long moment. He must not like the scrutiny because he pins her with an annoyed look. One that if he were at full strength and she cared about such things would have a deeper effect than it currently does.

"Spit it out kid." He growls, albeit weekly. Tsuyuko sighs, pitching the bridge of her nose.

"When Fugaku gets back we're going to have to decide what to do next. Your teammate betrayed you and put the entire camp at risk."

"Yea." The severity of the discovery is not lost on him. They both know very well what happens to traitors on the battlefield. Tsuyuko pats his shoulder, shifting him back as she does.

"Lay back down until they arrive, you still need to rest." He groans but complies and that she'll consider a win.

It's hours later, Tsuyuko has finished the last of her rounds for the time being, a plan has been made in regards to the traitor and now all that's left to do is wait. Tsuyuko hates waiting. There's too much time for apprehension to grow and anxiety to take root. She hates waiting because if so much as goes haywire when they do act it's going to end in disaster. Himura sits on her bedroll, stilling the antsy scroll of pen to paper as she writes up a report.

"You need to sleep."

"I will when I'm done with this. Where is Nawa?" He'd not been in the tent when she arrived some thirty minutes prior.

"He was doing a barrier check." Ah that made sense, Minato wasn't stationed on this camp with them. She wasn't actually sure where he was stationed. But without him here Nawaki was the best candidate for barrier seals.

He'd picked up an interest in them two years ago. Said it would be a skill worth having so their sensei taught him. Thinking of their sensei, makes her miss her dad, she wished he was here with them. If so then they wouldn't be in this position. He'd handle it and that would be it. Himura pats her knee, remaining silent as she stew.

Oh how she hated war, it was a monster that just demanded and took. Chaos for the sake of it. Senseless murder and death. A truly horrible creature is war.

"Himura." She whispers, daring not to look up yet, staring blankly at the ink on paper in her lap. The report bleeds together, a summary of what has transpired and what was discovered. Even more so a confirmation of what now has to be done. Tsuyuko feels as if she'll be sick.

"Hmm?" Himura acknowledges as he takes the scroll from her lap, reads over it before securing it closed.

"Are you sure?" She asks, fighting back the pit in her stomach and the wall in her lungs.

"I am." Himura says with a soft barely there smile. He knows what has to be done, and he's willing to do it.

Even if it means he's going to die.

“Okay.” She clenches her first, before clearing her throat. This was not what she wanted for her teammate. But they have orders.

“Tsuyuko.”

“Yes?”

“It’s going to be okay.” Himura remains assured, even in the face of her own confliction. They have no idea how this is going to turn out, only that these are their orders and they must complete the objective.

Tsuyuko hums, non committed to his words, she summons one of her messenger snakes. Quietly she secures the scroll with the snake. “The Sandaime’s eyes only, Katsuto.” The summons bobs its head and vanishes in the puff of smoke.

There’s no going back now.

Himura stays seated on her bedroll until Nawaki arrives, he pats her head as he gets up. Nawaki plops down on his own bedroll and passes right out. Tsuyuko envies his ability to just fall asleep, it was such a nice skill to have, one she knew he certainly took for granted.

“He’s growing a leaf again.” Himura comments, sitting down on the other end of their space. Tsuyuko glances over and indeed he is.

Their team's best kept secret, she always considered it, was the fact that Nawaki inherited his grandfather’s kekkei genkai. Something they’d learned after another near death experience at the hands of nefarious forces. Tsuyuko leans over and plucks the leaf off his neck.

“Nawa, wake up, I need to check you over.”

“Shsss Tsuyu, sleep time, check up later.” He mumbles into the bedroll earning a brow raised from her. Absolutely not, Tsuyuko pulls his ear.

“Sit up, it will only take a minute.” Himura laughs at them both from his side of the tent. Tsuyuko throws a glare over Nawaki’s shoulder once the dirty blonde sits up.

“I don’t know why you’re laughing, Himura, you’re next.”



“Tsuyuko?”

“He’s gone.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! <3

A fate worse than death...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

72 hours previously

Himura returns with Fugaku, who looks less than thrilled to be with her teammate. Tsuyuko knows that there is undeniable beef between the Uchiha and Hyuga clans, but she hadn't expected it to show up here. Himura didn't usually succumb to such antics, being a bastard and sold to the Senju clan in some deal she'd still like to read the contents of, he was removed from most if not all of the Hyuga's politics. Furthermore, Fugaku hadn't seemed like the type to let that kind of idiocracy fester between fellow shinobi. Of course it could also just be because of Himura's personality, he wasn't the nicest of folks, and was arguably the prickliest of her team.

The second they're both secure in the tent, an undetectable privacy barrier goes up courtesy of one of Nawaki's seal papers. Himura a second later rips the metaphorical bandage off for a second time. Fugaku stares at them both with a hard to read look on his face. But there is one emotion that is clear as day.

Betrayal.

"Are you certain?" Followed by disbelief, but not in the sense that he is unwilling to believe. Disbelief, not our right denial. No, this is the desire for certainty before he condemns his own teammate to death. Himura nods solemnly, pulling a scroll from his weapon's pouch.

"Yes. I snooped in your quarters and found this." Himura holds up his proof. A scroll tied with black cord. Tsuyuko hates those damn things, they've pulled several of them off ROOT agents they've taken down over the years.

"A scroll?" Fugaku challenges, brow raised, of course a single unopened scroll wouldn't be enough proof.

"It's a scroll from Shimura Danzo." Tsuyuko tells them without missing a beat. For a self proclaimed strategic genius the man was truly an imbecile, marking all his scrolls the same so they bear his chakra signature to control his hoard. A signature that oozes ill intent, one that instantly makes her sick.

"The elder?" Fugaku still seems to be having a time accepting what they are trying to say. Kugo on the other hand all but snarls, his canine partner growls alongside him. His instincts are immaculate, if that's the reaction garnered from the mere mention of Shimura's name.

"That guys bad juju." He grumbles, patting the dog's head to settle the all but wild beasts raging temper.

"I know you think he's eccentric Kugo, but that doesn't mean he'd order something like this.." Fugaku tries to object, but it is cut off by a look from his own teammate.

"If I'd let Nala, she'd devour him whole."

"She has good instincts , but don't taint her pallet with his flesh." Tsuyuko praises the dog. It earns her what she thinks might be a smile from the nikkun.

"Can we get back on topic please. Your current squad mate was ordered to condemn the whole camp. One that is housing several clan heirs or prominent clan members." Himura clears his throat redirecting attention back to himself and the scroll.

"Himura is right, we need to take the traitor out." Tsuyuko tells them, no point to sugar coat it now. Traitors condemn themselves to death the second they choose anything over their teammates. Something the Sandaime had made abundantly clear when Sakumo came back with his squad over complete the mission that maybe could be considered responsible for starting this war.

"It won't be easy, he's very skilled." Kugo warns them. A warning they don't take lightly even if Himura quips indicate otherwise.

"Considering our team has already killed multiple ROOT agents we'll take our chances."

"That's... I shouldn't be surprised, the arrogance of the Hyuga knows no bounds." Fugaku grumbles, giving her teammate a dirty look. Tsuyuko pins Himura with her own unimpressed look. He is a hundred percent intentionally messing with the Uchiha clan heir.

"I'm a bastard."

"Truly, but he's right Fugaku, our team has dealt with Shimura's agents more than once. He's had a hit on our team since its inception." Tsuyuko mediates, which is frankly not her job, as it's Nawaki's, but since Himura

has decided to be completely unhelpful, it's now her appointed task.

"But why?" Fugaku questions, he's full of them it seems. He has the great makings for a detective and head of the police force if he's always this diligent in his search for answers. Kugo sighs, it sounds like sandpaper, Tsuyuko shifts to run another check on his lungs.

He'll probably suffer with lung problems for the rest of his life. It wouldn't end his shinobi career but she would advise against further inhalation of smoke and fire jutsu for the foreseeable future if he didn't want to develop other lung problems on top of what would essentially become walking pneumonia.

"I think that's pretty obvious, Fu. She's the sannin's apprentice, and instinct tells me she's very important to her master." Kugo states as if it's the simplest of explanations.

"You're smarter than people give you credit for." Himura pipes up, wry smirk tugging at his lips. Kugo only grins, taking no offense.

"Thanks. I got eyes that work, and ears that hear real good." He beams, proud of himself. Tsuyuko rolls her eyes and removes her hand from his back. His lungs are functioning as well as they are able. Fugaku sighs at them all, he turns to his teammate.

"You think Shimura wants to take Orochimaru's team out to get to him? What business does he have with him? Surely he'd know better than to make an enemy out of the villages next Hokage." Kugo shrugs, Tsuyuko takes it as her cue to answer.

"Because he wants sensei out of the picture completely. Shimura would love to wear that stupid hat. But as we've seen, he's bad news and his methods are not up to the village's values." She doesn't hesitate to throw the elder under the cart. Truthfully she hates him ever so much, the more people who could see it the better.

"What proof do you have?" Fugaku questions, starting to linger on impatience. Tsuyuko hums. She has a sack full of proof, a brain full of memories, orders upon orders of undeniable proof.

"Lots, but for what will interest you. Have you ever wondered what's behind his bandages?"

"Scar tissue from injuries sustained during battle." If only it were that simple.

"It's a sharingan eye." Himura shoots down Fugaku's answer without blinking. Tsuyuko swears she sees red glint in Fugaku's own eyes for a brief second. Rage apparent.

Doujutsu theft was no joking or laughing matter. Such an accusation to be made, could not be made lightly, because it would automatically condemn the accused of treason.

"Impossible." Denial, of course it would be denial, because otherwise the reality is a death sentence. One Tsuyuko was happy to swing the executioner's blade.

"Is it though? The Uchiha never received the complete body of his lost teammate." Kugo hedges, apparently he's fully on their side with this. Of course Tsuyuko isn't surprised, it was after all his own teammate who poisoned him.

"I can't make a decision based on conjecture." Fugaku pinches the bridge of his nose, trying to remain calm. An admirable trait in the face of adversity. Tsuyko nods. She gets where he's coming from.

She wouldn't want to have to be on the receiving end of her own foresight. To have to blindly put faith in a child.

"We understand that, of course we do, however, we are expected to act and eliminate any shinobi connected to Shimura's nefarious deeds by orders of the Sandaime. If we suspect, it's our responsibility to take out the threat." She tries to placate, because as far as she's concerned. As far as her team is concerned, the discussions is over, the decision has already been made.

Traitors on the battlefield only have one fate awaiting them.

"If he's as bad as you say, why hasn't it been brought before the public?" Fugaku asks, a last attempt it seems.

"That is not a part of the Sandaime's current objective. Shimura is a crafty bastard and the moment he suspects he's under scrutiny there will be chaos." Chaos, utter damnation more like. Shimura hates losing, and he'll hate it even more when he realizes his death is imminent.

"What do you need from us?" Kugo questions, not giving Fugaku another chance to ask any more pointless questions. Shimura's fate just like their treacherous teammate is long decided, his end is just a longer game of cat and mouse. He knows where they stand and what must be done.

“Everything you know about the traitor.” Himura demands, and they spend the next several hours listening and collecting every little detail possible from Fugaku and Kugo. With every little piece of information given, Tsuyuko worries.

...

The plan is simple. Their plans are always simple. Tsuyuko will go off by herself, leaving an opportunity that cannot be ignored and that's when they'll make their move. The plan is simple, it should go off without a hitch like all their other plans before. It's simple.

Until it isn't.

Because what about having to use forbidden-jutsu classified as simple?

Himura is dead. Murdered by a traitor, kunai to the eye. Is what the official report will read, it is the lie they will perpetuate for years to come. Hyuga Himura killed in action. A lie, but for now the truth they must live by. She seals the body, the body transfigured to look like their teammate with forbidden-jutsu, from scrolls she shouldn't have possibly had access to. That by all accounts she'd never seen before. Nawaki is quiet behind her, the grass at his feet tell a story his lips will never. Rage beyond words.

This was never the plan they wanted to have to resort to.

Tsuyuko doesn't bother to wipe the blood from her face, Nawaki seems to be of the same mindset when she turns to stand before him.

“Tsuyuko?”

“He's gone.” She whispers, ignoring the snort from Himura from where he is sitting. He's missing an eye, something she cannot heal. But he is alive. He will live.

Of course a lot of good will do them since he has to become someone else. He'll be alive, but Hyuga Himura will be dead. Tsuyuko steps past Nawaki and pats his arm as she goes, it doesn't take her long to reach Himura's injured body.

“Are you sure?” She has to ask, she has to give him one more chance to say no.

“We need proof. Unrelated missing children reports from across the country during wartime isn’t enough evidence. You know we need eyes on the inside, or now an eye.” He tacks on with a sly half smile. Tsuyuko would hit him if he wasn’t about to leave them.

“Fine, don’t die before we can pull you out. Get word to the Sandaime as soon as you can, if you need me you know how to reach me. Keep the summoning slip close at all times.” Said summoning slip is roughly shoved into his chest, it’s all she can do to keep from crying. Everything is about to change.

“I will. Don’t worry about me, I’m going to be fine. Now do what you have to, the sun is about to come up.” Himura gestures loosely to the changing sky behind them. The time they gave the others until they’d need backup is coming up quickly. Tsuyuko stands, she clenches her fist at her side.

“What do you want us to tell you mom?” She whispers, Himura smiles softly.

“Tell her I died protecting those I love. It’s what she’d want, in place of me coming home.”

“Okay.”

When asked about the body of the traitor, Tsuyuko doesn’t miss a beat. Letting ice seep into her tone, poison still lingering on her tongue, sharp and unapologetic.

“I let the snakes eat him.” She admits without a single trace of remorse. It’s a lie.

One she doesn’t hesitate to tell, one that would have been true had she not needed the corpse for their plan to work. No one asks her anything else about what happened, there is nothing more to discuss. Traitors on the battlefield have one fate, execution, by any means necessary. Tsuyuko gets back to her task at hand, preventing mass casualty in the aftermath.

She loses two patients, ones who were already injured and weak when they’d contracted the disease. Their bodies are sealed and their tents and beddings and most belongings are burned. They are the only two shinobi lost to this particular plan of a corrupt man. It should feel like

a win.

But her teammate is gone. Two of her patients are dead.

Tsuyuko returns to Konoha angrier than ever. The pit in her stomach feels like a cavern ready to swallow her whole.

It should have never come to this. A fate that is worse than death. Alive, but dead to those you love.

Chapter End Notes

I am soooo sorry it has taken me sooo long to get this out! I thought I was going to be able to write a lot more than I actually have been. We're in the process of trying to sell our house and move to a different state and it's super stressful and not going to great. Which means I haven't been able to write like I planned too waaah. So again I'm sooo sorry updates are going to continue to be sporadic until we're settled again...

Anyway... chapter is on the shorter side for what I like for this, but I also didn't want to overload and I wanted to get it out as soon as I could! Hope yall have a nice day/night/evening/whatever :)

Like salt in the wound, bitter mourning

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The timing of their returns means that when they finally make it back to Konoha, sensei is out of the village. For that Nawaki is grateful, as much as he knew that they both need Orochimaru right now... He's not looking forward to lying to him. He side eyes Tsuyuko who's entire day seems to get worse when the gate guard tells their group that Orochimaru and Tsunade had headed out two days prior on a mission at the request of the Sandaime.

Nawaki bites back his own disappointment in favor of staring at his teammate who seems intent to not sign her return back in. It wasn't her job, it was Himura's job, he always signed them all in. So it seems it's his job now. The fifteen year old doesn't sigh, he hasn't the will for it truly, he simply takes the pen, marks them as returned and uninjured, Himura as KIA and moves on so the others behind them can do the same.

Apparently it's Fugaku's given task to sign his squad back in Nawaki notices because the man behind him does sigh as he glances over at where his teammate is walking away from the gate with his nikkun fast at his tail completely ignoring the gate guards who don't even bother to stop him and over to Tsuyuko. Tsuyuko who has apparently decided she begrudgingly likes the older jounin because she doesn't try to maim him when he rests his elbow on her head.

"Are you sure you're okay kid?" Kugo hedges, as Nala takes it upon herself to sit next to Tsuyko. Nawaki joins them, shoving his hands in his pockets. Obviously they're going to wait for the Uchiha before going their own way.

From the outside looking in, the five of them made for an odd group. Given the circumstances, the jounin's traitorous teammate had been the responsible party for the death of Himura.. To an outsider the four shinobi and the ninja dog becoming a close knit unit would be odd. Nawaki could almost feel the concern oozing off Inoichi at the gate, as he made not so subtle glances at them. He takes a page out of Tsuyuko's book and ignores the blond. But at the end of the day, they understood that it wasn't Kugo and Fugaku's fault.

No.

There was only one guilty party here.

"I should be asking you that, how are your lungs feeling?" Tsuyuko mumbles, eyes drooping ever so slightly. Sage, she looks terrible. Nawaki bites the inside of his cheek. He wonders how hard it will be to get her to take a nap..

"Just fine." Kugo retorts, just as Fugaku joins them.

Tsuyuko narrows her eyes as if she doesn't believe him, and to be fair to his teammate the jounin did wheeze a bit when they stopped. Kugo grins all sharp teeth, it's of course ruined by a cough.

"I'm not clearing you for duty." Tsuyuko grumbles, bending down to bury her face in the giant dog's fur. Nawaki shakes his head, he's pretty sure that sensei read them the riot act on not treating nikkun like actual pets. Not that it seems like the Inuzuka dog or her partner cares.

"For shame." Kugo smirks, apparently unbothered. Tsuyuko glances up tiredly.

"I'm not joking, in fact sometime this week I need you to stop by the hospital and get a chest scan. I've ordered one for all of camp that had been affected." Tsuyuko tells him, the only protest she gets from him is scowl. His retort is stopped by Fugaku's hand on his shoulder.

"I will make sure he follows through." He tells her, Tsuyuko bobs her head, she gives Nala one more pet before standing up. Finally she turns to him. Nawaki raises his brow at the look she gives him.

He'd been waiting for her, not the other way round.

"Are you coming home with me, or heading back to the Senju estate?" She questions as if the answer isn't obvious.

"You."

"Mm'kay." Tsuyuko turns back to the jounin, she offers a polite dip of her head and some half aborted wave. To think they still had a mission report to write.

Fugaku returns the nod, hand still clamped on his teammates shoulder. If Nawaki were a betting man, and no he had no intention to

pick up that particular bad familial habit, he'd say Fugaku was most likely about to make Kugo go see one of his clan's medics. A clan of fire breathers would have a higher specialization in lung focused medicine, so it would make sense. Of course that's only a guess on his part, the two could be going on their merry way or whatever.

"Don't be strangers, come round the compound sometime for dinner. I think you'd get along well with my little sister Tsuyuko." Kugo maintains his jovial grin, Fugaku sighs.

"That seems like a horrible combo. Might be worse than Mikoto and Kushina.." He grumbles under his breath. Nawaki can't help but to nod his own head. Tsume had been a year or so under them, but he remembered her well enough. She was probably the same age or close to Tsuyuko now that he thinks about it.

Tsuyuko blinks slowly at Kugo. Apparently not going to comment on anything. Nawaki sighs.

"We'll see, don't forget- chest scan, I will hunt you down Inuzuka." She chirps pointedly. Kugo's expression mellows out as he coughs.

"Yea, yea.. Alright, be gone children. Mission reports aren't going to write themselves."

Fugaku scoffs, Nawaki gets the impression that Kugo probably hasn't ever written his own report. Which is fair, really teams only needed one person to do that. Usually a team event that they all interjected in on, but one set of handwriting per mission. Tsuyuko ever meticulous when it comes to details, and the ever pressing matter of what they had to omit from said reports was typically the spearhead for team Orochimaru.

Tsuyuko opens her mouth to retort and he shoves his hand right over it. Nope, they had to go, he's starting to feel the dirt on his body again and really he'd much rather not.

...

Tsuyuko slips her shoes off at the door, nudging them neatly into the wall before fully walking into her home. Orochimaru is not in the village, and maybe it's for the better because all she wants to do right now is crawl into his bed and sob. Tell him everything that happened, what she had to do.. But she knows she can't, they can't tell him. Hiruzen-sama's orders to keep him out of this particular plan so he has plausible deniability if it somehow goes awol. Not that she thinks it

will come to that.

It's a good plan. Their last case scenario plan, but a good one nonetheless.

Nawaki is quiet behind her as he stares contemplatively at their shoes. Tsuyuko turns back to look at him. "Nawa?"

"I just realized how gross I actually am." He says, ever so serious. She snorts at the kicked puppy look on his face.

"Go use Minato's shower. I'm going to take one and then figure out dinner so we can get this report written." He bobs his head, looking rather irate by that. Reports were not fun, post mission death reports were even worse.

"Joy."

"Yea."

It takes them a few days to make the trip over to the stone. Going to the stone makes it official, and truthfully neither were ready for that yet.

So of course it's ruined.

Something about seeing him here, here at the grave marker for their teammate, her friend, feels like salt in the wound. The Hyuga clan head is arguably a reasonably attractive man for his age, he's still regarded as strong, still revered and honored. Some would even argue that this gesture is kind for the man. However, Tsuyuko takes one look at him and her blood boils under her skin. How dare he be here? How dare he violate this place with his very presence?

Nawaki's hand on her shoulder isn't enough to hold her back.

"You shouldn't be here." She all but spits, visceral and venom lacing every word. Reverberating through every vein, rage laden and ready to strike.

"Excuse me? I don't know who you think you are to tell me where I should be." He sneers, Tsuyuko sees red. Fugaku was right, the arrogance of the Hyuga knows no bounds.

Tsuyuko scoffs. "Pathetic, to think you've come here to show your respects but you don't even recognize your son's teammates."

"So then, you are that snake's students." She finds she doesn't like his tone when speaking of her father. How dare he sound so contemptful? That 'snake', was more a parent to Himura than this sorry sap ever was.

Orochimaru, who couldn't know... who believes one of his students died. Tsuyuko's guilt eats at her, it fuels her rage. The injustice of this entire situation. So how dare this man, who has never once showed an ounce of care for his own flesh and blood, how dare he speak so rudely about their teacher, her dad.

Tsuyuko snarls, ready to bare her fangs, but suddenly another hand is on her shoulder. This hand is far more petite than Nawaki's, it's riddled with callouses and other markers for kunoichi.

"You shouldn't talk to the future Hokage's students that way, Hoshi." Senju Moriko, a petite woman some years younger than the Hyuga clan head speaks. Her voice is soft and bellike, and it is littered with the tell-tale signs of someone in mourning.

Of course she would sound like that, her son just died.

"Tsk, of course it would be you." There is something bitter about the way he says you. Something so broken. Perhaps, perhaps they hadn't been told the full story.

"I have just as much right to visit my son's grave as you, Hoshi." Himura's mother steps between them, closing the distance as she goes. Gracefully she moves, silent as death itself. Tsuyuko can only stand in awe of a woman who knows her own worth so clearly.

Hyuga Hoshi has nothing to say to that, he doesn't even spare them another look as he turns back the grave marker. Without a single word the Senju woman takes his hand. Tsuyuko wills her rage sizzle out under her skin, for now she needs to let it be, she and Nawaki will come back later. Some mourning needs to be done alone.

Apparently the mission their sensei is on is a long form, which is.. Not Tsuyuko's favorite thing, truthfully. She was really hoping that after everything they'd just been through, that she'd get to spend time with

her dad. That Nawaki would get time with his sister before the next bout of deployment. Except she was beginning to doubt that was going to happen at this rate. They'd already been back a full two weeks, and realistically since neither were injured it wouldn't be long before they got their next set of orders. Before they're sent to the front again.

Himura had been able to establish contact with the Sandaime, but otherwise they haven't heard anything else on that front. They probably wouldn't until later, until there was something they could do. Until proof outside of her memories was garnered in full. Which would take time.

Time that they really didn't have. So wait they would, on borrowed time, until the exact right moment. Tsuyuko flicks the pendulum on her desk, it swings in tandem like a slithering snake. She sits back and watches the pendulum's swing.

She could be patient. If Shimura thought he'd win this game of snake in the grass, if he thought he could bid his time and win the long game... he was in for a rude awakening.

For the time being she redirects her focus back to the work at hand. Back to her poisons, vials of elixirs and other concoctions. Her research laid before her, scrolls and notes and anything in between. On the battlefield there was no time for testing, so she had to make sure everything would work the way it was intended or that she knew enough to make something up on the fly. Furthermore, her side project ordered by the Sandaime needed her attention while she was in the village. He didn't want a bloody scene for Shimura when it came time, if and when it came to that the Hokage wanted his old friend's death to be silent. No point to involve the village at large, no need to elicit panic at times like these. Because one thing was for certain Shimura wouldn't make it out of the third war alive.

The vial in her hand turns fluorescent, bubbling up and then sizzling out as the pendulum swings. Tsuyuko brings the vial up to inspect, it's not finished, at best as it is now it would just send someone into a coma. She makes a note, disposes of the remains, she'll try again later. Tsuyuko clicks the light off, the lab goes pitch black followed by security seals igniting to protect all their research.

She's so close to an answer, she can almost taste it. Or maybe it's remnants of the salty lunch she'd eaten with Nawaki... Suddenly she's struck with another idea, something so simple it might just work. It

didn't have to be perfect, it didn't even have to be right. It..

... it just had to be enough to kill a man.

Chapter End Notes

< 3

Our actual objective- A good reason why..

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They settle camp for the night, once again high up in the trees to avoid being spotted, just the two of them this time. Jiraiya off on his own misadventure elsewhere. Orochimaru tries to ignore the sympathetic, quite concerned look Tsunade keeps giving him.

He does not want to talk about it.

One of his students is dead and he wasn't there to protect him. But even more, he knows that a portion of that fact is a lie. One that for whatever reason was being bled as the truth currently and he couldn't risk their lives. The three bracelets he'd embedded with seals and chakra to track his students' own life sources never went out. There is no doubt in his mind that Hyuga Himura is still alive.

Except his students went to great lengths to report otherwise, a body bag with a DNA match for his oldest student and one horribly damaged bakyugan eye with it. The entire thing wreaked of forbidden jutsu, jutsu that only he and a select few had seen. Orochimaru has no idea when Tsuyuko was exposed to it, because he knows it had to have been her doing.

"Tsunade. I'm fine, stop staring." He grumbles low under his breath, arms crossing over chest, he pins her with a hard stare.

He's not a liability, he's not going to suddenly combust overcome with emotion. No in fact, he was going to hold how he felt about the entire ordeal close to his chest until all the pieces revealed themselves. Orochimaru is a man of facts, and while he likes a good fallacy he isn't intentionally going to poke holes into this right now.

Hyuga Himura is alive.

But for whatever reason, right now he had to be dead. Orochimaru had to think he was dead. They didn't want him to know.

It screamed of a last case scenario, screamed of a final straw sort of plan. He knew his students well, something drastic like this. Their plans were always simple, point blank, to the tee. For them to have done something like this, to have gone to such length to preserve a

lie...

There had to be a good reason.

There was nothing simple about having to use forbidden jutsu, doing so was always a risk, it's forbidden for a reason. Orochimaru tunes Tsunade out for the time being, she could wax poetics all she wants. He just doesn't have the time for them right now.

He appreciated her sympathy, but they have work to do. He'll focus on the 'loss' later.

Right now he will choose the focus on the mission at hand and then he will look into his students '*death*' at a later date.

Tsuyuko and Nawaki get their next set of orders at the end of their two weeks home. They are to head to the camp that she remembered Minato being stationed at for support, the blond had decided to stay on the front versus returning home, starting his next rotation as soon as the first had ended. Given, his rotation hadn't been near as long as Tsuyuko and Nawaki's last one. So it made sense why he felt the need to stay.

They aren't intending to wait for anyone else, it wasn't a requirement and if Sakumo's students were a part of the group she really didn't want to deal with Inoichi right now. Contrary to what he may believe she is fine, she doesn't need to be psychoanalyzed at every inconvenience. She would survive.

Unlike everyone else, she did in fact know how to handle her emotions. Most of the time. The props of having a fully functional frontal lobe before the rest of them.

"Let's go, Nawaki."

"Hold, we can wait for Fugaku." Nawaki gestures over his shoulder, and sure enough it's the Uchiha heir coming towards the gate.

He's down two teammates, Tsuyuko briefly wonders if the jounin is being slotted in with them. She couldn't reasonably release any of her patients for active combat with the state of their lungs. The chest scans she'd ordered had all come back with varying but telling results. Their lungs would give out in long combat, no holds bar, they would

die if they stepped on a battlefield for the foreseeable future.

A waste of a life, but the sticking point was they were all liabilities until their lungs recovered in full.

“Fugaku.” Tsuyuko greets easily when the firebreather stops. He sighs at them both.

“You’ve both been assigned to me.” By the way he says it the twenty-something jounin is almost exasperated by the concept.

Not that either of them blame him. Being saddled with teenage chunin probably wasn’t anybody’s idea of fun times. It was like being told you had to watch your younger siblings when you’re home from college or something like that. Not that Tsuyuko would understand that particular phenomenon, she’d been an only child at one point, and currently she enjoyed having a younger brother and watching said kid. The time she’d gotten to spend with Kakashi over the last two weeks had been the highlight of her return home.

“Cool with us, right Tsuyu?” Nawaki elbows her, ah, she must have spaced out for a second there. Tsuyuko dutifully nods her head.

“Sure, I’ll probably get shunted off to the med tent anyway, be nice to know you have someone competent watching your back Nawa.” Fugaku actually cracks a smile at her statement.

“Funny, Kugo said something similar about you both earlier.”

“We got your back too Fugaku.”

“Let’s get going, I don’t particularly wish to socialize with anyone else for the time being.” He tells them, and Tsuyuko never expected to find herself liking the Uchiha heir- but he really did speak her and Nawaki’s language.

“Oh thank goodness, us neither.” She grins all teeth, Nawaki just shakes his head and Fugaku cracks another barley there smile.

Surprisingly, Tsuyuko isn’t immediately shunted off to the med-tent. Only because it’s being run by Dan, who takes one look at her and sighs. “If I let you in here are you going to rearrange how I have everything?”

She considers the older medic for a moment. It's not her fault that most medics didn't prioritize organization like she did, it's not her fault that she tended to be peculiar about where things were meant to go. However, while the two had had their downs in the past.. "Hmm... no, but only because I know you know how to sort supplies correctly."

He sighs at her.

"Very well, if you would like to help I won't say no. I heard about how you had to take over during your last rotation, so try to take it easy okay?" Tsuyuko doesn't call him out for the fact that he still tends to treat her like a child. Frankly, taking is 'easy' after her last hellish rotation sounds nice.

"Yea, sure, just don't go and do something stupid so I have to do that again." She points an accusatory finger in his direction that has the light blue haired man rolling his eyes.

"Of course not, you'd be very cross with me and I don't want to get on your bad side again." He teases, Tsuyuko stares blankly at him. She's not going to comment on that. If Dan would treat her more like a doctor than a child then she wouldn't have had to butt heads with him growing up.

He may be older, but she had more experience than him, she was more skilled than him. Not that she would ever say that outloud.

"Good. Alright, where do you need me most?" Instead she goes with what is important. Meet the need. Help wherever she is able.

"Diagnostics, and incoming trauma. Our combat teams have been facing an opponent with some level of skill with poisons." Dan gestures to the far corner, Tsuyuko is already letting her attention redirect to there.

"Oh? On par with me?" She asks her next question over her shoulder, getting ready to walk away.

"They don't even come close to you, so far what we've seen hasn't been deadly. More so irritating than anything." Dan admits easily, well then that was good.

A poison user on par with her... well that isn't something anyone wants to have to deal with.

“Fascinating. Point me in the right direction, I’d like to see for myself what kinds of non-lethal poisons we are dealing with.”

“Right over there.” Dan points just off of where he’d pointed out diagnostic and incoming trauma to be. That would do for now.

“Got it!” Tsuyuko walks away, looks like she has work to do.

Unlike last time, Tsuyuko finds reprieve from the med tent. She patrols with Nawaki and Minato. Fugaku is around, apparently his being assigned to them didn’t actually mean much in terms of how much time they were expected to work directly with him. But being a jounin, and someone who apparently liked tactician and battle logistics- he maintained close contact with the head of their camp. Constantly in and out of meetings.

She doesn’t envy him that. If that was what it meant to be a jounin then she wasn’t sure she ever wanted that responsibility.

It’s during a patrol with Minato that Tsuyuko tells her best friend, her brother, what transpired during their last rotation. To some extent, not the full truth, because she’s not willing to risk Himura’s life by telling more than those who do know that he’s alive. But... she does finally tell him about her memories. Under the safety of a privacy seal and small barrier while they eat a ration.

To Minato’s credit, he takes it reasonably well. “I get why you waited to tell me. I’m not mad. I take it the sannin know?” Tsuyuko nods.

“I told sensei, and he probably told his teammates. And I think Jiraiya might have told Sakumo. And I told the third before the war started.” She tells him, because truthfully, she has no idea for certain if Jiraiya and Tsunade know, she acted as if they did but she never outright confirmed it with them. Just assumed.

Which is hindsight probably wasn’t the best choice, she should have outright asked, but she hadn’t. Truthfully she knew Orochimaru would tell his teammates, in a world where they were friends and relied on each other... it made sense for him to tell them. Like she’d told hers.

“I see. Anyone else?” Minato’s voice pulls her back, Tsuyuko shakes her head.

“No. I'm only telling you now, because some time in the next year a play against Shimura will be made.” She tells him seriously, Nawaki nods his head beside her. Minato hums, halfheartedly stroking his chin. What a weirdo.

“Alright, what do you need from me? How can I help?” A helpful weirdo though. Tsuyuko has always been grateful for his willingness to be helpful.

“Right now, stay alive. Until the play is made out the only objective is to discreetly take out ROOT operatives. There are two in this camp, high up, they need to go.” She doesn't hesitate.

Without Himura, they're down a man, and their plans work better in threes. Sure they could probably trust Fugaku, he seemed reasonable and had taken the whole Shimura is a traitor thing well last time. But Tsuyuko doesn't necessarily want to put him in this position, this gray zone, it wouldn't be good for him as an Uchiha. Bringing Minato into the fold is the better choice, not only is he closer to them in age- his status as an orphan means he doesn't have to consider clan politics on top of village loyalty. That and the two of them have always worked well together.

He'd be easier to fold into her and Nawaki's existing team dynamic.

“Who?” Minato questions.

“Third in command, and the lead scout.” Nawaki tells him without hesitating. Turns out all those poisons she used to lace their watchers in lingered for a long time. She pinned them the first day.

“Damn. Okay. Let me think... are you going to poison them?” Minato directs his question at her. Tsuyuko nods.

“I would like to. Since our enemy has been noted to use poisons to some degree- we can use it to our advantage.” Regardless that the poison ‘specialist’ was subpar, it could still work reasonably in their favor.

“Reasonable. When?”

“At the soonest convenience. It's why we were assigned to this post. Taking those two out is our actual objective.” Tsuyuko informs him. Procuring the scroll with the orders from her pouch.

“They cannot be allowed to return to the village.” Nawaki tacts on.

“What did they do?” Minato takes the scroll from her to read over.

“Kidnapping. This post has the most reports of children that have gone missing in the last six months.” Nawaki tells him, face soured. Minato looks up to make a disgruntled expression.

“I see. And because it’s closer to a pretty prolific battlefield the reports are probably being noted as casualties of war rather than taken seriously.” She’s so glad he’s a genius, that he could put that together without them having to spell it out.

“Exactly. Except, some of the missing children have started to reappear. Horribly mutilated, post mortem autopsy reveals their deaths don’t match when officials said they would have died as wartime casualties.” She precures another report from her pouch, from a secret storage seal, and hands over the autopsy reports so Minato can see the full scope of the travesty.

“Human experimentation.” He grimaces, eyes narrowing as he regards both scrolls.

“Yes. Shimura is conducting human experimentation and using children as test subjects and he’s getting away with it because we’re at war. A war that he all but created.” Tsuyuko grumbles, crossing her arms over her chest.

Sage, she was so ready to bury this old man. If he were dead at least 70% of her problems would go away, and she could move on to focusing on more important things. Like bringing Konoha into a more modern medical age.

But alas, that old bastard continues to breathe so for the time being almost all her focus is on the task at large.

“Shit. Okay, I have an idea.” Minato hands her back both the scrolls, taking a quill from his own supplies he begins to lay out his idea in the dirt. Tsuyuko seals the scrolls away.

Minato makes a plan in the dirt, it’s not as simple as they like to keep them- but after last time a few extra steps might not be a bad idea.

“Nawa?” Tsuyuko turns to regard her teammate, he nods his head, grinning from ear to ear.

“I think that will work really well. Good idea Minato-senpai, now, we need to get on the move. We’ve been stationary for too long.” Tsuyuko

clears the ground at that, nodding in agreement. Minato basically hops up, tucking the quill away and dusting off his hands.

“Right, Tsuyu?”

“Yup. Alright boys, let's finish this patrol, cause we've got work to do.”

Chapter End Notes

in which Minato is a helpful weirdo XD
gotta love Tsuyuko's inner dialog

thanks for reading!

< 3

One down, one to go

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There were many issues with being reincarnated and having to suffer through having an adult's memories in the cognitive function of someone whose brain wasn't fully formed yet. Tsuyuko is no stranger to this concept, this misgiving if you would. The migraines, the outburst, the emotional capacity of cardboard at times. But none of that compares to the memories that form after the new information that the brain takes in on top of the existing database. While she would never claim to have an eidetic or photographic memory, she has yet to forget a face that she has seen since becoming Tsuyuko.

She's seen his face before. It was horrifically burned into her brain, laden with notes of sick, rotten flesh, and dying embers. How could she forget the face of the men who condemn her village?

His picture had not been with the files, the first time she sees his face is the day they confirm their targets. It takes her forty minutes to quell the rage that begins to build in her chest. To ignore the cavern that is boring deep within her being. It's been ten years almost since then, perhaps she should have moved on from it long ago. But...

-Tsuyuko is barely four years old when her life crumbles to pieces. The hand in her own is horribly cold and splotched with bruises and blisters. She doesn't look at her guardian's face knowing it won't be pretty. Disease showed no mercy, it took no prisoners. It left only death and agony in its wake. It pillaged and destroyed until nothing and no one remained.-

She doesn't tell Nawaki about the revelation she has after they confirm their first target, it's not his burden to bear and maybe, just maybe after they've killed this traitor will she finally be able to put Hirofu to peace in her heart. Of course, she knows that is probably wistful thinking, life was never that simple. Memories, especially tragic ones, they loved company and lingered beyond their metaphorical grave.

Tsuyuko doesn't look up from her food when Minato plops ever so gracefully next to her. He takes the plate, with a half eaten onigiri and sets it to the side. "You've been quieter than normal, has something happened?"

Minato on the other hand, apparently can still read her like a book, has no problem knocking at the door she's been trying to keep closed. Tsuyuko shrugs.

"I know our target... he was there." She whispers as she eyes the privacy seal hidden under her plate. Clever. Her fellow orphan, self-proclaimed adopted brother is ever so clever. He never fails to impress her.

"There.. As in Hirofu?" Minato makes a concerned face as he questions for clarification.

"Yea." Tsuyuko is relieved she doesn't have to spell it out, and simply nods in return muttering under her breath. Minato doesn't hesitate to wrap one arm around her shoulders, giving her a tight squeeze.

"I'm sorry Tsu. we can adjust the plan.." He offers without hesitation, Tsuyuko pats the arm wrapped around her shoulder. No point in going through the trouble, the plan is good.

"No.. it's fine, I'm good bait. Besides, this could offer me some closure, or at least offer my village justice." Murdering one of the men who poisoned her village could be cathartic. It would at least be justified. Shimura may have given the orders but the shinobi who followed them are just as responsible for the outbreak and subsequent mass death toll.

"Alright, then we will proceed. Everything is still on schedule." Minato tells her as he pulls his arm away. Her plate is still sitting next to his leg on the log. She nods, glancing up to the midday sky. The season is beginning to turn, they need to finish this as soon as they are able.

The next rotation was a few weeks out, and they couldn't risk letting their targets get away again.

"Good. I have to check the med tent, will you eat the rest of that or throw it away for me?" Tsuyuko stands, stretching her limbs out, not even bothered when her entire back makes a horrible crick and popping sound. The shinobi life was brutal, she could feel it in her bones.

"Sure thing." Minato nods, barely concealing his concern over the sound her back had made.

She's fine.

Much like their previous plan, Tsuyuko agrees to be bait. Shimura wants her gone as much as she wants him dead, it makes it easier for their mission. He was easily played when he couldn't conceal his hand. The Sandaime knew him like a book, could read him page by page, line by line, word per word, and he'd given Tsuyuko enough of said autobiography to be able to use it against Shimura and ROOT discreetly. Bringing Minato into the fold, a prodigy who could keep up with her on an intellectual level made the work even easier. He didn't need the playbook to know how to move the pieces, he could figure it out of his own intuition and intellect alone. Meaning they had no catch up to play, they could go straight into the next move without any hesitation.

Tsuyuko is good bait. She'll always be good bait when it comes to ROOT. She knows it, Minato obviously realized it, and the Sandaime had outright stated it to her face that Shimura wants her dead and she had his full permission to do whatever necessary to make his old friend regret that desire. She accepts the orders as they are, a means to survive, to allow herself to prioritize her own life and the life of loyal comrades.

Tsuyuko pays no attention to the target as they walk just a pace behind her. She pretends to focus on the false objective, resource collecting, both for her poisons and for remedies for the poison that keeps getting the best of the shinobi at this camp. It's not her fault he'd been so easily tricked into following her.

Iwa having someone who could use poisons to an extent had really worked out in their favor. She lets a string filled with a concoction of poisons slip down her sleeve just as a hand roughly grabs her shoulder, Tsuyuko doesn't hesitate to plunge the syringe backwards into the shinobi's thigh like one would administering an epi pen. Except this is not a tool to save, it is a concoction made to kill and to kill fast.

"You little-" he chokes up on his words as his throat begins to swell and veins begin to expand and lips turn blue.

It's a faster death than he deserves. Truthfully, Tsuyuko wished she could have made him suffer longer, after everything she witnessed... he should have choked on his own spit a little bit longer. The ROOT

operative drops, leaving a disgusting corpse at her feet. She leaves him there to rot, to be found later.

One down, one to go.

Of course, their next target won't be so easy to kill. They were posed as the second in command of this camp. Not as easy to manipulate as a scout would be, not when said scout mysteriously disappearing was still fresh in the air. The three of them, the sannin's students, don't let that get the best of them. Minato comes up with several plans, none of which feel like they'll work the way they need them to.

Tsuyuko digs her feet in the gravel around a campfire. She's supposed to be on break, supposed to be eating right now before she was needed in the med tent again. Her nice separation, reprieve from the med tent had ended recently when Dan was sent back to Konoha- his sister and brother-in-law are dead, he's needed home to look after his niece, a girl only a year or so older than Tsuyuko's own little brother. She had sympathy for the older medic, but until a more senior medic arrived to replace him it meant she was back in charge of the med tent. A notion that she was beginning to despise.

Especially when it interrupted her ability to be there for her teammates.

A plate being handed to her, shoved rather unexpectedly at her, pulls her from her head. Tsuyuko blinks, once then twice as the person before her stops being a hazy blob. Shikaku's face registers almost a second later, honestly she'd sorta forgotten that they were here too. Inoichi was still very much so on her nerves so she had been going out of her way to ignore the blond. She looks between him and the plate he just handed her, raising her brow ever so slightly.

"You need to eat, you look like one good wind will blow you away." He tells her rather bluntly. Tsuyuko considers the food on the tin plate, and considers the concern that Shikaku has not tried to hide. It's etched in deeply on his face, she doesn't know if he even realizes he's wearing such a face.

"Thanks." She mumbles, glancing away to not have to deal with his expression. Honestly it was making her heart race and she wasn't honestly sure why and she really didn't need added anxiety right now. Tsuyuko misses the soft smile he gives her, she seems to always miss

them these days, as she takes a seat for once doing as told.

She's not hungry, not in any real means of the word, but she probably needed to fuel her body to not crash and burn.

"Don't mention it, just eat a bit. I know you're busy and stressed, but it won't do you any good if you run yourself into the ground looking after all of us." Shikaku grumbles, taking a seat on the log next to her. Tsuyuko considers him from the corner of her eye while taking a bite out of what might be a skewered rabbit.

He'd grown into quite an attractive looking teenager. His face was chiseled, currently covered in scruff, and still unbearing of any scars. Those must come later, or soon, she thinks bitterly. She has no notion that she can spare him from whatever caused those scars that she once knew his adult face to have. Shikaku is pretty and the teenage girl in her can't help but to notice that fact. Tsuyuko takes another bite of the skewer to distract herself once more, it's not the worst thing, and it was loads better than stale rice.

"I'm not a child." She huffs after a moment, setting the plate in her lap. Turning to glare at him, Shikaku raises his hands in a mock surrender.

"No you're not. We'd be lost without you and your horrible bedside manner." He teases at the end, reaching over and tucking a loose curl behind her ear. Tsuyuko huffs, her own cheeks heating up.

"My bedside manner might be ass, but at least you haven't died." She shoots back, Shikaku snorts.

"I suppose that's fair." He stops himself, glancing away oddly, Tsuyuko raises her brow and leans into his space to poke his cheek.

"What's on your mind Shikaku?" She questions softly, she can see the wheels turning, Shikaku hums but waves off her question.

"Don't worry about it, eat your food." Tsuyuko huffs at the blatant dismissal. Whatever was going on with him he wasn't going to tell her it seemed. She wasn't about to make him either, Tsuyuko shrugs.

"Whatever..." She picks the rabbit skewer back up, Shikaku nudges his knee against hers but doesn't say anything else.

He doesn't get up to leave while she eats, just sits there next to her with a solid presence. It's nice in a way, to not eat alone, to not be

expected to chat idly or to have her existence psychoanalyzed like some people tended to do when she ate with the group. Just the two of them together, it was something she had really missed.

For the first time in a while she doesn't leave a plate barely eaten.

Chapter End Notes

Shorter chapter this time, but it was starting to drag and feel a bit filler-y (which its not) so I decided to just let it be shorter - but we're finally getting some ShikaTsu build up sprinkled in, and ya know some murder but schemantics
thanks for reading!

<3

Home on the horizon

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

By some crazy turn of events, their second target is killed on the battlefield. Tsuyuko is the one who does the autopsy when the ROOT operatives body is brought back to camp. Sure enough a tattoo under his tongue confirms their orders as complete. Both traitors are dead.

Maybe it means they'll get a good break once their rotation ends. Tsuyuko is of course very doubtful of that idea, but she holds out hope because she really wanted to spend some time at home. To see her dad, to terrorize her little brother for longer than a few days. Yea, that would be nice.

Tsuyuko writes up the autopsy report quietly. How utterly ridiculous that it ended like this. She really thought it was going to be harder. Oh well, she won't complain. Dead was after all dead and that's truly all that mattered in the end.

"Tsuyuko, have you finished?" She looks up from the chart in hand to find Fugaku standing in the mouth of the makeshift morgue. It was really a sectioned off area of the med tent where they processed dead bodies to be sealed and stored to be returned to their loved ones if able.

"Yea..." She trails off glancing back down at the dead shinobi's face.

"What is it?"

"He was ROOT. Tattoo under his tongue and everything." She tells him quietly. Fugaku closes the tent flap behind him, stepping over to do his own examination after grabbing a pair of gloves.

He steps back after concluding his own tiny investigation, the gloves are thrown in the small bin for medical waste before he turns to regard her carefully.

"I see. Did you know beforehand?"

Tsuyuko nods then adds. "Yes. I was aware, Nawaki and I had orders to take him and the lead scout out." His face gives nothing away as she finally informs him of their objective. All but admitting to being

the reason said scout had been marked as MIA.

“I will close the investigation into that case then. I assume you two took care of it.” The future head of the Uchiha clan states knowingly, crossing his arms over his chest as he speaks.

“Yes. Sorry... I didn’t think it would be right to involve you. I don’t want to put you in a bad position with your clan.” She answers honestly, Tsuyuko was a firm believer in owning up to her decisions.

“The consideration is noted and nice, however in the future please allow me to make the decisions for myself. I would have helped you.” He doesn’t hesitate to tell her. Tsuyuko hums, uncommitted really.

She knows he would have helped. Knows he wouldn’t have hesitated to help had they asked.. it’s why she hadn’t put him in the position. She is all too aware of how precarious these things are.

“We’ve already asked a lot of you, keeping this secret...” By all means after the last rotation it would have been well within his rights to demand retribution for his clansmen, if Shimura had Kagame’s eyes.. Which he does, Himura had confirmed that for them before his own departure. But, it was too soon, they needed more time, they still don’t know where his base of operation is.

They don’t know where the missing children are going before they turn back up in various stages of decomposition and rot.

“I will deal with the consequences when and if they arise Tsuyuko. Now, is there anything else I should know?” Fugaku leaves no room for objection, no reason to keep trying to persuade him to stay out of it. Tsuyuko shakes her head.

“No. Our objective is settled for now.”

“Alright then. Seal the body, it could prove to be useful for evidence later. I can store it in my department once we return.” That actually isn’t a bad plan, Shimura wouldn’t think to look there if he thought the bodies of his men were being kept.

Which he should have no reason to. Before now there was never a good reason to keep a body, mainly because they were murdered and Tsuyuko didn’t need that coming back to her and Nawaki later. But... now with a death at the hands of the war itself, with no known family to return the corpse too... It’s not a bad idea to store it for evidence, and possible study into the seal work inked under tongue. However...

“Yea. On it... are you sure?” Still she feels the need to ask. She does not want to be responsible. Fugaku nods.

“Yes, I am sure.”

“M’kay.” She can’t find any reason to doubt him so the only thing she can do is follow the order. Tsuyuko goes about getting a death scroll laid out, seal work will never be her specialty, but this one thing she knew how to do. The body is sealed with the autopsy report, the medical chart and the case notes better to have it all in one place before she hands the black cased scroll over to Fugaku.

He takes care tucking it away in his weapons pouch, probably into a specially sealed compartment to keep close at all times. Tsuyuko doesn’t envy him this, having to carry around a dead body like that was not fun at all. She knew all too well, having been the one responsible for the transfigured ROOT operative from their last rotation.

“Good, now, as the recently promoted second in command for this outpost I am ordering you to go take a break.” Fugaku orders with a straight face, arms crossing back over his chest brow ever so slightly raised as if daring her to object.

“I’m the most senior medic.. I can’t just leave my post for a nap.” Tsuyuko of course, with a penchant for not respecting authority or something, challenges with a fact. She’s the senior most medic, she can’t just leave her post.

“Yes, you can. You must, it’s an order.” Fugaku tells her blandly, Tsuyuko gets the feeling if she objects he’s going to write her up. Fine, whatever.

“You’re something else Uchiha.” She grumbles easily. The Uchiha heir simply smirks at her as if he is all too aware.

Tsuyuko shakes her head, stepping around him to leave the makeshift morgue. She really does hate it in this part of the med tent. It’s too cold, kept that way with seals, it makes her bones ache in an all too familiar way. Fugaku follows out behind her, reminding her to take a break before heading towards the med tent’s exit. She’ll do that as soon as she’s checked back in with the medics on duty and update what little records they are keeping on hand.

After what feels like an eternity away from the village, in reality it was just a very long two months, they return home. Minato is with them this time, but Fugaku opts to stay for another few weeks. Tsuyuko spends the entirety of their return trip hoping that Orochimaru will actually be in the village when they get there.

It's been over four months since she last saw her dad. If she doesn't get to see him during the down time between rotations she is going to riot. Or complain in excess to Biwako-sama about how cruel it is, who will certainly sort her husband out and make it so Tsuyuko can see her dad.

Her kinship with Biwako, while coming out of nowhere, was something she would always be grateful for. The older woman, having been through something like Tsuyuko, was a great ally to have. It being just so that the kunoichi midwife was also her own maternal grandmother in another life is another miracle in itself. Or one of the universe's great mysteries, but she wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Tsuyuko remembers her past life grandmother fondly, in the time before her mother had died young, tragically and she had been raised by her grandparents. Her grandfather passed away when she was a teen and her grandmother had lived long enough to see her become the first doctor in their family. Being able to have another life with the woman who had raised her the first go round, even if they weren't family now, was something she would never take for granted.

Of course, she isn't sure if Biwako-sama realizes who she is to her. Tsuyuko, having put it together relatively quickly based on the stories the Hokage's wife told her of her first life, had never outright confirmed it with the older woman, that she was the same girl from those precious memories. The person she was then, and the person that this life had made her are almost fundamentally different. As a doctor she would have never been okay with killing like she has become as a poison master.

Truthfully Tsuyuko cannot bear the idea that her grandmother would grow to hate her as she is now, so she finds herself unwilling to confirm their previous relations. Content with the rapport the two have built now in this life. Biwako is a lovely person, just like her grandmother had been, she was looking forward to the next time they had tea.

“Tsuyu, are you okay, you’re really quiet.” Nawaki nudges her shoulder as he sits next to her, they’d stopped for food and water, Tsuyuko had of course used this time to get lost in her own thoughts now that they had no objectives and other obligations to complete.

She nods, smiling softly at her teammate. “Unhuh, I’m good, just thinking about how i will riot if I don’t get to see sensei this time.” Nawaki’s grin in return to her statement is infectious.

“Oh yea, for sure. His last letter said he would be in the village when we got back.”

“Good. Alright, I’m ready to start moving again whenever the rest of you are.” She states loud enough for the rest in their party to hear. Minato looks up from re-securing his weapons pouch to frown ever so slightly at her.

“You barely ate anything.” He doesn’t hesitate to point at the half eaten ration in her hand. Tsuyuko shoves it into Nawaki’s hand, he’s a growing boy he needs it more before standing and stretching out her limbs.

“I promise I’m good, we’re only a few hours out now. If we can manage I’d like to get back before the sun sets.” She would like to get back before Kakashi gets out of his pre-academy school care thing, but that’s probably not manageable and she’ll just make a plan to see him tomorrow.

“We can move out in five, drink some water at least.” Shikaku calls out from where his group had set up to have their own rations. Tsuyuko gives a quick thumbs up, she could do that, even if she wasn’t particularly thirsty at the moment.

But she can tell they’re all worried about her for whatever reason so for now she’ll comply to ease their minds. She might be younger than all of them, but they really didn’t need to be so overprotective, she knows her own limits better than anyone else. Nawaki hands her a canteen and she takes a few sips. It’s the best she can manage considering she has no appetite. Anticipation of their return will do that, she thought, but doesn’t say it outloud. Inoichi is still giving her funny looks and she’s so over him trying to do whatever it is that he’s been trying. Again, she’s self-aware, she knows her limits, they really didn’t need to worry so much.

She’d be hungry once they were in the village, but by then she could convince Orochimaru to make them dinner or something and actually

eat food she likes instead of stale rice and dry granola bars. Sage, she's so ready to be home. Only a few more hours to go, home is finally on the horizon.

Chapter End Notes

< 3

Thanks for reading!

A house full of life and noise is home

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

His house is too quiet. A notion he would have never believed possible mind you. But as it stood, his house, their home was far too quiet. The lively atmosphere that his daughter brought with her, a near constant stream of half coherent thought, as well as the scattered mumbling and sounds of pen hitting paper from the other child occupant of the house is undoubtedly missed. Orochimaru considers the silence as he sips his black coffee around mid afternoon.

With Jiraiya out on a mission, and Tsunade busy at the hospital, Orochimaru is alone for the first time in a long time. He loathes it entirely. For the last several years of his life, noise has been a daily occurrence for him. For it to be gone as it is, well it's something he finds himself missing.

He misses the children, his daughter and his students, misses the bickering between Minato and Tsuyuko that had become a fixture of his daily routine. Carefully he spies the clock in the kitchen to see how much time has passed, how much longer he will have to revel in silence before noise returns.

A sad five minutes has passed since he last looked. But, it's five minutes less until he suspected his daughter would return. The anticipation might actually kill him. It was surely an inconvenience, to think he's become so soft.

Of course it doesn't stop him from keeping a small knitted snake sealed inside his pack, and currently sitting with him while he drinks his third cup of coffee of the day.

A flare of chakra followed by the intentionally loud opening of the front door breaks the silence. Noise slips in, first by quiet rustling as shoes are removed and tucked away, then a low chatter of three voices quietly bickering. Followed by a very loud and excited "Tadaima!" That echoes and lapses with three voices. Orochimaru finds himself smiling into his coffee mug.

Tsuyuko rounds the corner first, his daughter he notes instantly has gotten taller in the months she's been away on the frontlines, she also

appears about 15kg under what she should be for the current height, a realization that has a frown pulling at the corner of his lips.

“Okeari, Tsuyuko-chan. Minato-kun, Nawaki-kun.” He returns the greeting, nodding his head at the boys who round the corner much slower than his daughter has. Tsuyuko smiles brightly, practically skipping over to him and then stops to consider something for a moment.

Orochimaru raises his brow at her and is then unsurprising is being pulled into a hug. He doesn’t hesitate to wrap an arm around her shoulders, Tsuyuko sinks into him even further nuzzling her face into his jonin blue covered collarbone. Her hair, which is almost matted, is brushed familiarly against his jaw. The hug is brief but not unpleasant, Tsuyuko pulls away first and claims something about taking a shower and being hungry before springing up and bounding down the hall to her room.

He snorts, finding the whole thing amusing and par for the course when it comes to his daughter's disposition. Minato rubs a hand over his face, looking absolutely done with Tsuyuko’s antics, Nawaki just smiles fondly as the bathroom door is shut loudly and the sound of a running shower starts.

“I’m going to put away my gear and shower.” Minato informs the room before he turns on his heel and walks towards the other side of the house. It leaves Nawaki standing there, which affects the teen not at all one bit as he ambles over and takes a seat at the table.

He doesn’t try to swipe Orochimaru’s coffee but he does steal a treat off the little tray that the snake sannin had brought over with him earlier.

“Did you read the report from our last post?” Nawaki questions quietly after a moment, both showers are running so it would still be a while before the other two return. Orochimaru nods gently.

“Yes, I did. I’m sorry that I wasn’t there to change anything. How are you holding up?” He doesn’t say help, because he thinks that’s a given, no- he’s sorry that he couldn’t be there for them, that they had to make the choices they did. Had he been able to be with his students, that entire situation could have been different.

He knows that Himura is alive. But for the sake of everyone he would keep that knowledge to himself. His students went to a great deal to create this lie.

Nawaki's shoulders shake but he doesn't otherwise cry, if anything the boy looks angry. An anger that he is used to seeing on Tsuyuko. The anger that injustice inspires, that the harsh reality of life causes. Nawaki takes a long deep breath before he is able to answer.

"I'm okay, all things considered. Honestly I'm worried about Tsuyu more. This whole thing has been really hard on her and on top of that she keeps getting thrown into positions of authority when we haven't had any time to recover." Nawaki tells him honestly. Orochimaru nods, he could see why Nawaki would be worried.

"The two of you are up from tokubetsu jounin promotions for your efforts on the fronts. Once that goes through you will be stationed in the village for a while, to recover from consecutive stints on the frontlines. It will be a while before either of you see the front line again." He tells Nawaki seriously, the fifteen year old blinks slowly in return as he obviously processes what's been said. Personally, Orochimaru thinks this is a silly move, both students could be qualified as full jounin...but because of Tsuyuko's age, not quite fourteen yet, the full step to jounin was probably not in her best interest.

Nawaki could argue for full jounin, if he wanted it that was and would most likely get it being older than Tsuyuko. But he won't, in reality neither of his now chunin genin would give a damn about a promotion.

"That's cool. But does that mean you will be gone more?" Case in point, he thinks blandly when Nawaki finishes processing the information and responds to his statement.

"Not exactly, because of my position I will be expected to be in the village until the time is right to pull me for combat. The politics of war are the crux of us all." He replies mildly, Nawaki pulls a face, considers something, chews the inside of his cheek and then shrugs.

"Oh. Politics sounds terrible, so glad I'm never getting into that." He intones nonchalantly, pulling another snack off the tray. Orochimaru finds himself raising his brow at his second oldest student.

What happened to his idealistic, positive, kageship wanting genin? Who is this almost grown man sitting before him?

"Did you not once aspire to be Hokage?" He challenges, which just gets him another shrug. Nawaki leans back on his hands and looks up at the ceiling.

“Yea, I did, but honestly I don't think I'm suited for it. Based on what you've said as you've been doing whatever this is called and things I've witnessed since becoming a shinobi... I think I can do more good where I'm at now. Besides, I don't really want to duke it out with Minato over the position later.” He turns towards where Minato is reentering the room. The younger boy pulls a face, obviously not catching everything that was said before he walked into the room.

“Why are we fighting?” He questions while taking a seat across from Orochimaru.

“Obviously, we're not. After seeing you on the battlefield I don't ever want to have to fight you.” Nawaki laughs, Minato continues to look quite concerned. Orochimaru almost rolls his eyes at them both.

“You make it sound bad.” He mumbles, reaching out to grab one of the treats for himself. Orochimaru starts making a mental list of what is in stock in the house, because he is obviously going to have to feed these children. Nawaki grin's jovially.

“Dude, I don't know if you know this, but you're absolutely terrifying on the battlefield. Seriously sensei, the few times Minato was with us when we came upon small skirmishes it was insane. Those two are a match made in hell or something.” He turns to direct the last bit at him, gesturing loosely over his shoulder at Minato who's face heats up.

Well at least he has remained modest.

“So I've heard. Since Minato is finished with his shower and it sounds like Tsuyuko will be a while longer, go use the other bathroom to get cleaned. I assume you are staying for dinner?” Nawaki doesn't even pretend to look ashamed at the question, but he does pose his own in return.

“Is my sister going to be at the hospital late?”

“From what she said earlier, very late.” A fact he had not heard the end up, and will continue to hear her complain about for the days to come. It is not his fault Hiruzen-sensei wants her to stay in the village a while longer. Nor was there anything he was willing to do about it.

Especially since his team's continuous presence In the village was generally a good deterrent.

“Then I'm staying for dinner if that's okay?” Nawaki hesitates and

now Orochimaru finds himself rolling his eyes.

“As always it is fine with me, I have no qualms feeding my students, go get cleaned up Nawaki-kun. Now, Minato-kun tell me how your hiraishin has been fairing in long combat.” He makes a small go-ahead gesture towards the other wing of the house. Nawaki nods quickly before pushing up and away from the table to stand and do as instructed. Minato startles ever so slightly but a second later launches into his observations about the technique that he was quickly making his own. Orochimaru listens carefully, only interjecting when he thinks it’s necessary.

Tsuyuko returns about half-way through Nawaki’s shower and plops not at all gracefully next to him with a specially made brush for her hair and some product Jiraiya had brought her once upon a time. He’d gotten it from a brothel somewhere not in the land of fire, having been told it would be helpful for coarse and textured hair. The container itself is almost empty, so they’d have to go about finding another like it soon. He plucks both the brush and canister from her hands before standing. Orochimaru works carefully at detangling Tsuyuko’s hair, it’s not matted like it had appeared earlier but there are more knots than usual.

“Thank you.” She mumbles, ducking her head down as if to hide. Orochimaru once more rolls his eyes, he hums simply instead of warranting that with a response.

He’s never had any issue helping his teammates with their hair, not helping his daughter with hers. Even if it could be trickier at times.

“He’s going to have permanent ligament damage in his wrist if he keeps going at the pace he is without adjusting to counter the strain.” Tsuyuko cuts in, sharply, as Minato was about to go into another long tangent about how effective the technique is.

“That could pose an issue, many a great shinobi have been taken out by weak wrist ligaments.” He comments dryly, raking his hand through a section of detangled curls.

Minato proceeds to pout at them both. “You keep saying that but you haven’t given me an actual suggestion on what to do about it Tsu.”

“Wrist braces, compression wraps, go see a shinobi physio and have them recommend some exercises for you. Use your brain and figure it out.”

“Gee thanks, so helpful Tsu.”

“Welcome.” She sings songs, then tilts her head up to regard him.

“I’m starving.”

“I believe it. Your height to weight ratio appears off by a good 15 kilos.” For added measure he narrows his eyes on to hopefully show how displeased he is by this observation. Tsuyuko sticks her tongue out at him.

“She’s basically become a bird, with how sparingly she ate on the fronts.” Nawaki speaks as he walks over to the table toweling his hair dry as he walks. Orochimaru can only sigh at her.

Sadly that sounded like something that she would do. Tsuyuko has always had a hard time with food, so it is not at all surprising that the trend would continue on the battlefield.

“Chichi, camp food is disgusting. The rice is almost always stale, would you want to eat a stale onigiri?” She pleads her defense with a small grin. Minato shakes his head.

“Inoichi is convinced there is something wrong with you. He swore it can’t be normal to eat so little.”

“And is Inoichi a doctor? No. I made sure to eat enough to maintain and not die or collapse from exhaustion. I know my limits.” Tsuyuko stares at Minato blandly as she speaks. Nawaki apparently finds the ceiling fascinating because the boy suddenly has nothing to say on the matter. Orochimaru finds himself wanting to sigh again.

To think he had missed this.

“Well you are home now and need not to worry about those things right now. Are the three of you fine with katsudon?” He interjects before they can descend into chaos around him.

“Sounds great.” “Yum.” “Whatever is fine.” He gets a chorus from the children in response.

“Alright. Tsuyuko, your hair is officially no longer tangled. I’m going to start dinner preparations, do I need to order you three to write your field reports?”

“Nope, we’re going to work on that now. It’s what we did last time.”

Nawaki tells him ever so seriously. He could imagine how that went, the two of them post their last rotation, just Nawaki and Tsuyuko. Having to write a report that was to some extent a lie.... Orochimaru nods at them, he has nothing more to say to that, he knows better. He hands Tsuyuko her brush back before turning on his heel to go to the kitchen to start dinner.

He will leave them to their current task, they should be mostly alright for the next half hour or so.

Chapter End Notes

In which Orochimaru is soft :)

I apologize that the last few chapters have been on the shorter end of the range I like too keep, I will say I liked the pacing of them too much to try to make them be longer... that being said I will try to keep the chapters between the 2500-4k word range that I've been utilizing for the most part...

Thank for reading!

<3

Dog people problems

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Shikaku is minding his own business, he's relishing the time at home with his parents, lounging around the Nara compound lazily basking in the sun. Thank you very much. He did not ask to be rudely awoken at ten am in the morning because Inoichi wanted to talk to him. He loves his teammates, really he thinks they're both great and he's glad that he's gotten to have them as teammates as long as he has. It would have been a drag to have to be jumped around like with what team Orochimaru and Minato frequently dealt with. It seemed like too much work to actually make sense. However, after spending the last almost four consecutive months with his teammates he would rather not see them for at least a day.

But apparently that does not seem to be the case.

"With how much you worry over Tsuyuko, people are going to start thinking you have a crush on her." Shikaku draws lazily, barely looking at Inoichi through half open eyes. Inoichi all but gags at that.

"I have no romantic interest in her. She makes no sense to me, how are you not concerned?" Inoichi gapes, waving his arms around in obvious exasperation. Shikaku rolls his eyes at his teammate.

"Who says I'm not? Unlike you though I know to mind my own business. Tsuyuko isn't like other kunoichi, and she doesn't appreciate being treated like a kid." He grumbles, finally pushing himself up on his elbows. It's certainly not the most comfortable position, so he hopes this conversation will be over soon.

He'd really like to get back to avoiding clan responsibilities for at least another hour.

"She's not even fourteen yet." Inoichi protests, as if Shikaku is not aware of how much younger the sole kunoichi of their group is. He pins his teammate with a look that he hopes the blond interprets as he's being dumb and Shikaku thinks he's ridiculous.

"She still graduated before us, she's Orochimaru's apprentice. You're going to piss her off more than you usually do if you don't give her some space." He warns, and he really doesn't want to deal with that

rant from Tsuyuko.

"I just don't get her." Inoichi complains, still pacing around him, hand on his face like he's trying to figure out the world's most difficult puzzle.

"You don't have to get everyone, now I'm trying to enjoy the sun on my face so could you either sit down or go away." Shikaku doesn't mince his tone, if Inoichi is going to continue to talk he should at least have the decency to sit down.

"Rude. One more thing and then I'll be gone."

"Yea, what?"

"Is your clan pushing for marriage yet?" His teammate's tone takes a turn for the serious, Shikaku sighs forcing himself to sit all the way up. He considers the question for a moment before answering.

His parents had no notion to force him into marriage any time soon, as their only remaining child they tended to be overprotective and typically kept the elders off his case. Eventually he would be expected to marry, to take a wife and give the clan their next heir, but currently there wasn't a rush. A year from now that could change, once he's seventeen and depending on what the war is doing that is.

"No, probably in the next year though. Is yours?" Shikaku returns the question, Inoichi groans dramatically as he nods his head.

"Unfortunately." He confirms easily.

"What have you said?" It doesn't hurt to ask, and he can't say he's not curious. The Yamanaka clan was more stuffy than the Nara at times and they were really steeped in tradition. Which was not Inoichi's vibe at all, and if Shikaku were a betting man he'd wager that once Inoichi becomes the head of the clan he will change a lot of those old traditions.

"That until the war is over I'm not making any choices on a wife." Inoichi doesn't hesitate to tell him, meaning he'd probably already had to give that answer a few times. Shikaku hums, that's a good one.

"Got to remember that for when I start getting those questions." He mumbles, Inoichi makes a face brow slightly quirked.

"Are you going to ask Tsuyuko?" The following question catches him

completely off guard, what the hell does Tsuyuko have to do with this.

“Ask Tsuyuko what?”

“To be your wife, I know you love her.” Shikaku’s brain stops for a second as he’s pretty sure he levels Inoichi with a look that could only be described as dumbfounded.

“Ino...” He can’t even form a response to that. Inoichi looks less than pleased grumbling something under his breath that sounded a lot like ‘idiot’ before he’s launching into his next sentence.

“What? It’s true, you’ve been in love with her since the academy, we all know it.” Inoichi exclaims with little care. Shikaku finds himself rubbing his face, well that was just great. He wonders who this ‘we’ encompasses.

He does not ask, he does not actually want to know. Instead he shrugs, glaring just a bit at Inoichi.

“Yeah well, I don’t think she’s into me that way. And besides, I’m really not interested in pursuing romance right now.” It’s the truth too, not that Inoichi appears to believe him. He won’t deny loving Tsuyuko, because he does, he loves her. But he also has absolutely no interest in that right now. It won’t do either of them any good to have that type of worry added to everything else. Furthermore, until they were both jounin a relationship between them was in bad taste since she was still three years younger than them.

“You know what, whatever.” Inoichi scoffs. Shikaku knows anything else he says will fall on deaf ears so he doesn’t bother. Ino’s got something in his head and there is no changing that, stubborn ass.

“Are you done?”

“Yea, I guess. Have a good day cloud watching, Shikaku.” Inoichi concedes, thankfully. Shikaku rolls his eyes.

“Whatever. Go be a menace to society elsewhere.” A quick goodbye is given, and finally he is alone once more to enjoy the sun on his skin. For, what appears to be the next thirty minutes until he will be expected to make an appearance around the compound.

Joy.

Tsuyuko is not minding her own business, a fact that is probably giving someone gray hairs but that is hardly her problem. Honestly she could have not gone to the Inuzuka compound to check in on Kugo, just stayed at home today to enjoy the first day off. But she didn't know if she trusted the jounin to actually do as he was told without Fugaku in the village to remind him. So off she went that morning well after breakfast and after Orochimaru had left the house. Minato was on a date, although when she said that his face became a beat so... she'll let him figure that out. How she ended up in this situation though, is her problem and she's not really sure how she is supposed to deal with it.

Inuzuka Tsume is probably the same age as her, she'd graduated around the same time as Nawaki and Himura if her memory serves right, or maybe the group after them... She actually doesn't remember, Tsuyuko paid very little attention to the classes that weren't hers. In hindsight that was probably silly but with how bad her migraines were as a kid, well she's not holding it against herself.

"You!" Tsume barks, actually maybe it's more a growl, Tsuyuko blinks slowly. She'll never understand dog people.

"Me?" She echoes back carefully, having no idea why this girl is intercepting her on her self made mission to go pester a jounin into getting proper healthcare. Seriously, why was the idea that getting seen by a doctor and healed or treated or whatever was needed was the worst thing ever by these people?

"Yea, you, you're the medic who treated my brother right?" Tsume all but steps into her personal space, which Tsuyuko isn't really sure how she feels about it. She likes her personal space to stay personal. Thank you very much.

"I am, I'm actually on my way to see him right now." She replies easily enough, taking a discreet step back. The other girl apparently doesn't notice and goes into a full blown rant. Hands waving and everything, she's very expressive, which tends to not be a shinobi trait- Tsuyuko would know she's been told far too many times that she's too expressive. It instantly gives Tsume a point in her book.

"Good, I swear he's such a fucking idiot, has barely been doing the treatments and he sounds like a dying cow. I need you to talk sense into him, if he fucking dies because of this shit and leaves me to deal

alone I will not be happy.” The other kunoichi raves, soundly absolutely done with her brother. Tsuyuko bites her lip.

She swears if this idiot has gone and made himself more sick in the last two months she’s going to fucking scream. After everything she went through to make sure he didn’t die at camp... Tsuyuko takes a deep breath, she can’t jump to conclusions based on the rantings of a concerned sibling. It doesn’t stop her from agreeing with the other girl though.

“Understandable. Did he say why he hasn’t been doing the treatments I prescribed when I was very clear how irritating that would be to me and explicitly went over the consequences of said choice? Which include permanent lung damage that could cause organ necrosis and paralysis which would prematurely end his shinobi career or you know worse, kill him.” She intones blandly, leveling the other girl with a dry look. Tsume shrugs, shaking her head no.

“Nah, but between us I think he’s depressed. Blames himself for what happened. For whatever reason.” She admits seriously, Tsuyuko nods along. That would explain it.

For as irritating as she found most jounin when it came to seeing medics, Kugo had seemed like the type to take it seriously once the seriousness of the situation was explained. However, depression would put a hindrance to any rational thinking.

“I can put a recommendation in for mental screening if that is needed. In the meantime where is he so I can do a general check up.” Again though, she can’t make any concise diagnostics until she sees him.

“Main house, I’ll walk ya’.” Tsume makes a gesture for her to follow, Tsuyuko goes along easily.

“Thank you, I met him at the hospital clinic so I have no idea where I’m going here. I told him when I got back from my last post I’d hunt him down.” Meaning she’d fully intended to ask someone for directions had Tsume not intercepted her at the gate. So she supposed this had worked out well for both of them.

“Smart. This way, we’re gonna go through the back gate. It’s a direct access to Kugo’s room.”

“Fine with me, please lead the way Tsume-san.” The other girl makes a face at the use of the honorific.

“Tsume is just fine, you’re Tsuyuko right? You were the group with a bunch of heirs.” Tsuyuko nods at the question.

“Yup, that’s me, they were my classmates. Minato and I graduated early but they were soon after.”

“Thought so, when Kugo described you, then the only person i could think of that matched that description was you. You aren’t as short as you were.” Tsume tells her, confirming her identity and then going straight into idle chit chat. Tsuyuko likes how blatantly this girl ignores all the standard rules of shinobi conversation.

“I don’t think you have much room to talk Tsume. We’re practically the same height and your sandals appear to be lifted.” Tsuyuko points out, Tsume just grins. It’s kind of feral but she doesn’t mind.

“Ha! You’re not too bad Tsuyuko, I think we’re going to be great friends. Alright we’re here, Kugo is through there.”

“Thanks again.” She dips into a quick bow before turning on her heel and walking over to the closed door.

“Kugo, I swear if your lungs are worse off than when I left you I’m telling Fugaku!” Tsuyuko knocks loudly on the door, pitching her voice up a few notches to really get the jounin’s attention, Tsume cackles behind her and she gets the feeling that the other girl won’t leave but she doesn’t mind.

She won’t ever understand dog people, but she does understand loyalty and love and they resound those traits. The door opens slowly, Kugo for the most part looks the same as he had the last time she’d seen him. His brow shoots up, a cheeky grin taking over his expression.

“Huh, you got taller.” He apparently is fine enough to make fun of her. Tsuyuko scoffs, glaring hard.

“You jackass, come out here and sit on the engawa so I can get this exam started. Have you been doing the treatments?” She gets straight into it once the door has shut and the man has walked over to where she asked.

“Yea, yea, for the most part. I haven’t had a lot of energy, I don’t always remember. I’m fine.” He answers honestly.

“Un huh, I’ll be the judge of that. Now sit and let me work.”

Thankfully Kugo sits not at all protesting. Nala sits behind him like a silent protector and Tsuyuko makes a mental note to get a treat for the nindog later.

“Anyone ever tell you that your bedside manner is absolutely shit.” He asks her suddenly, giving her a funny look. Tsuyuko gives him her own unimpressed stare while pulling her stethoscope out of her med patch. What a stupid question.

“I’ve been told, and my only response is that it hasn’t killed anyone yet. Besides, in my experience most shinobi need to be handled more roughly. Take a deep breath.” She holds the stethoscope to his back first, then again to his chest.

That... doesn’t..

“Aye, you’re probably right with that.” Kugo concedes, but she’s stopped paying attention to the banter a few seconds ago.

“Yea...” She mumbles, almost distractedly, quietly instructing him to take another breath.

“What’s wrong?” Tsume pipes up, concern evident in her tone and probably etched across her face. Tsuyuko doesn’t look at the other girl to confirm it though, she focuses on the jounin sitting before her.

“Might be nothing, I want you to get more imagining done. Your lungs don’t sound any worse but they don’t sound better either. Even if you missed a few treatments a week there should be some improvement. Have you experienced any increased shortness of breath or a tightness in your chest?” She questions, running a few more checks, blood pressure, o2 stats, very standard stuff.

She’s sure as she runs through her checks the frown on her face continues to grow.

“No more than usual.” But not worse, but not better either. Which isn’t good enough for her. He should be on the mend. Not..

“Headaches, dizziness or nausea?” Tsuyuko keeps her questions short and to the point, eyes focused on the man’s hands. There discoloration around his fingertips.

“Yes, yes and no.”

“Hmm, I absolutely want to get a new set of scans. How long have

your fingertips been purple?” Tsuyuko points at the discoloration around his fingertip, it gets a blank stare from the jounin. Meaning he hadn’t noticed.

“I noticed that the other day.” Tsume pipes up, which is helpful. The other day typically meant in the last week or so, which while not concise it’s a timeline she can work with.

“I don’t think your blood is oxygenating properly. Which means you have to go to the hospital, preferably today, and I will order another set of chest scans and bloodwork to confirm.” She informs them, talking more to the room then directly to Kugo who is still slightly vacant.

Something that doesn’t go unnoticed and she adds it as a symptom to the mental chart in her head. She’ll need to check in on the other patients that had been affected by the poisoning, she had no idea how the long term after effects would be and until she checks in with them won’t know for sure if this is related or something different. With the exception of the two patients she lost on that front, Kugo had been the worst off, but she can’t take any chances with this. Tsuyuko refuses for Shimura to get this win.

He doesn’t get to kill anymore people with this disease again.

“What would have caused that?” Kugo asks quietly, staring at his hands. Tsuyuko hums, placing the stethoscope back around the shoulders.

“Organs are dramatic and rely on each other to function properly, sometimes when one organ is in distress the ones around it take on the stress too. I can’t say what the cause is definitely without the test results to confirm it.”

“You heard the woman, get going I’ll hold down the fort here.” Tsume bites out with a forced cheer. Kugo groans, rather dramatically and Tsuyuko rolls her eyes.

Seriously, she’ll never understand dog people, the hospital is not that bad.

Chapter End Notes

I know some of yall are expecting there to be like actual romance in this at some point, and like I hear ya however its not really the main point of this for me... there will be a semblance of romance

at some point but probably not for some time, right now the story
is focusing on other topics

Anyhow, thanks for reading!

<3

Bone Deep Exhaustion

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tsunade resists the urge to pinch the bridge of her nose. She knew Tsuyuko would be itching to get back to work at the hospital, she did not think the young doctor would bring in work with her. She is however very impressed by the fact that her student managed to get Inuzuka Kugo in the hospital for blood work and other labs..

Labs that the teen was currently nose deep in reading through and not paying the slug princess any attention. Tsunade doesn't mind, she would rather Tsuyuko pay attention to the labs and her patients. "What are you thinking?"

"Oh, Tsunade-shishou, hello. Look at this." Tsuyuko shoves something into her hands, Tsunade grumbles as she takes the lab results and holds them up to see better. Oh, that's not good.

"Hypoxemia. As a result of the damage sustained to his lungs, which is now affecting his heart. What a mess." She pinches the bridge of her nose, Inuzuka Kugo would not be pleased to be given these results.

His career is over.

"Tell me about it, I need to run these test on all the shinobi who had been affected by that fucking strain." Tsuyuko in that moment looks incredibly young, Tsunade often doesn't think about how young the poison master is. How young she'd been when she started her medic training. It made her heart ache in a manner that had no place in their line of work.

"I'll put in the orders for you, are they all still on medical hold?" She offers, setting the results back on the table next to Tsuyuko who has moved to pull up other charts.

"Yes, unless someone went over my order and changed it." The teen grumbled, not looking up from whatever has caught her attention in the chart. Tsunade hums.

"That's unlikely, but if it happened I'll reprimand the right people."

"Thanks shishou." That does get the girl to look at her, Tsunade

considers her face for a moment. She really does look young. Too young for the promotion she'd just been given... which begs the question has she been told yet?

"Don't mention it. Did Orochimaru tell you..." She starts and then trails off, just in case she hasn't been told Tsunade can make something up or fill in the gaps. Tsuyuko nods.

"About the tokubetsu jounin promotion, yea he told me after dinner. I don't care." Tsuyuko says in one quick breath, barely glancing away from her work.

"Thought that might be the case. But look at it this way, you'll get to log more hours here and with your other projects." Tsunade finds herself supply almost teasingly, it gets a small barely there smile.

"That's about the only good thing that's come out of the stupid war so far." Tsuyuko grumbled while holding a vial up to the light for examination. Tsunade almost wants to ask what she is doing, but decides it's probably better to not. Instead, she thinks she should perhaps ask about the other thing.

"Do you need me to ask about it?"

"No thank you... I don't really want to talk about it. Himura is gone, and I still have work to do."

"If you're sure, but if you change your mind I'm available to listen." She doubts the teen will, stubborn little girl, but Tsunade wants her to know that she can.

"I'm okay Tsunade-shishou, but thank you." Tsuyuko sets her vial down before standing, carefully gathering the charts and various test results. The last vial she'd been testing was placed back on his holder with a withering look, but it does appear to be unrelated to the rest of the documents in the teen's arms.

"Do you want me to come with you when you give this news to Kugo?"

"Nah, it will set him on edge and he's already a prickly man. Just sucks, his career is over. All their careers are probably over if this isn't isolated." Tsuyuko waves her off, soundly almost as defeated as she looks. Poor girl. Tsunade nods, she decides to take pity on her.

"I will handle the rest for you. Go tend to your Inuzuka patient."

“I’m going, I’m going. Is Dan around at all?”

“He’s still on bereavement leave. Shizune-chan is having a hard time with the loss.”

“Understandable. It’s hard becoming an orphan. I’m going now.”

“That it is... good luck kid.”

Tsuyuko rolls her eyes before heading out of the room. Tsunade sighs at the teen’s back. She knew what had to be done now was not going to be fun or easy. The jounin is very lucky they caught this now and not later, but it probably won’t be seen as luck.

Not even twenty-five and his shinobi career is over, his life will be drastically changed. How absolutely terrible.

By the time the day is nearing an end, Tsuyuko is exhausted. She had not expected to be stuck in the hospital lab almost all day looking at blood work and ordering tests. While the familiarity of it was welcome, she’d forgotten how tiresome this type of work was.

She loved diagnostics. Loved being able to put the pieces together and solve the mystery, it’s why she’d gone into infectious disease in her first life. Why poisons called to her in this one. But it doesn’t change the fact that it’s exhausting. She’s so tired.

She nearly crashes into another person on her walk home. Tsuyuko starts to apologize but the words die on her lips when she meets the gaze of the other shinobi. It’s one of Himura’s older brothers. Which one, she’s not entirely sure, they were identical twins after all.

“You’re Himura’s teammate, the poison specialist.” The unidentified Hyuga twin identifies her, Tsuyuko nods, biting the inside of her cheek to not correct him. She’s a poison master.

“Yasha Tsuyuko. And you are?”

“Hyuga Hizashi. Himura was my younger brother.” The way he says it is so fond, so soft. Himura had never had any ill feelings towards his half siblings, they supposedly hung out when they could and his older brothers had taken it upon themselves to train with him when they were available. But the situation was a complicated one.

“Oh.” She can’t really think of anything else to say.

“You look dead on your feet, are you alright?” Hizashi questions ever so politely. Did he know any other way?

“Huh, oh yea. Sorry for running into you just now.”

“You didn’t though. Stopped right before collision which is impressive considering you look like death warmed over.” He tells her with a bland expression that is too close for comfort.

“Occupational hazard or something.” She mumbles, glancing away. The wound is still too fresh for her to want to play nice. Not that she usually had time for such trivial societal expectations, but she did occasionally pretend to care.

Himura is gone. She misses him dearly. Misses his surly personality and no nonsense attitude, misses the way he’d help her gang up on Nawaki or the way they would pick on her.

“I suppose so. Have a good rest of your evening Yasha- san.” Hizashi must realize that she is not social, or maybe even he senses her displeasure, distrust of him and he politely bows out.

“Yea... you too.” Tsuyuko is sure her face screams how weird she found that entire encounter. But she also finds that for how tired she is she doesn’t really give a shit.

Her bed is a welcome sight after the day she’s had. Tsuyuko has plops face first into the soft-ish mattress. She doesn’t even bother to take off her clothes, just wiggles up and under a cover ready to fall asleep.

If she were so lucky. She’s not, sleep evades her. As it usually did. What a fucking joke. Tsuyuko sits up, when it’s clear her body is not going to cooperate. She grabs whatever she was working on last off the side table, if she can’t sleep she might as well do something mind numbing.

Except her hands ache and wrist pinch with pin pricks. She sets the crochet stuff down. Contrary to what some people thought she’s not a masochist and didn’t enjoy hurting herself more. Well then, what the hell is she going to do now?

She does know she's not going to stay in her room, that's for sure. Tsuyuko gets out of bed, but takes one of her lighter blankets with her. Konoha nights were cold. After signing on with the snakes she found herself more susceptible to temperature changes, it was very rare now that she wasn't too cold or too hot. Quietly, as to not disturb the other inhabitants of the house she walks to the main living area. Maybe some tea would help soothe the insomnia.

Surprisingly she finds Minato in the kitchen filling the kettle with water. "Couldn't sleep?" She questions softly when he turns to face her.

"My bed is too soft." He whispers back, Tsuyuko nods. That made sense, he'd been gone consistently longer than she had.

"I'm sorry." She keeps her soft quiet volume as Minato sets the now full water kettle on the stove top.

"What about you?" He asks while turning the knob to light the gas stove, it clicks loudly a few times before fire ignites and is adjusted.

"My normal insomnia unfortunately." Tsuyuko answers with a shrug, debating whether or not she's going to reach around him to grab a teacup for herself.

"Bummer. Want some tea?" Minato gestures loosely towards the kettle.

"Yes please, that's actually why I can I'm here." She intones blandly, it gets a hint of a grin from Minato before he nods his head and grabs another tea cup from the cabinet.

"Fair." He chuckles to himself, a sort of half delirium type laugh. Tsuyuko pays it no mind.

Neither speak after tea has been made, they sit silently at the kitchen bar for a long while. Long enough for the sun to start coming up, and Jiraiya to return home from whatever it is he gets up too these days. He looks perturbed by their presence but somehow also not at all surprised.

"That post station insomnia gets the best of us all. It's nearly dawn, you two should try to take a nap or something." Jiraiya eyes them both like he's trying to discern something. Tsuyuko shrugs at him.

"Mines my normal insomnia, Minato's bed was too soft." She informs

him plainly, not even the least bit affected by her all nighter. Minato looks tired, but she doubts he'll take a nap. They were perhaps too old for that now, being young teenagers and now both jounin ranked shinobi. Naptime is probably frowned upon now.

Jiraiya sighs sympathetically as he shakes his head. "Why don't the two of you make a pallet in the living room, and I'll tell you a bedtime story." Tsuyko blinks slowly at his statement, his shit eating grin, oh he's not joking.

"The sun is coming up." Minato monotones with little to no inflection, he must be very tired, he doesn't even bother to try to act like he gives a crap. Tsuyuko has to try very hard not to laugh. Jiraiya rolls his eyes before reaching over and ruffling his student's already fluffy and gravity defying hair.

"Too bad, kids who stay up all night have to take a nap." He taunts, grinning wryly at them. Minato shakes his head and she rolls her eyes but honestly even if she didn't think they'd nap, it didn't sound terrible. A pallet on the floor, just like old times.

So a pallet is made on the floor of two bedrolls, a copious amount of pillows and hand made blankets and various crocheted stuffed animals. Minato plops down first, face first into a pillow and Tsuyuko decides this is the perfect opportunity to use him as a pillow as she throws her favorite pillow into his side. Jiraiya chuckles watching them move about like sleep deprived ducklings, not that either sannin apprentice is made aware of his thoughts.

Minato is asleep not even two minutes into his masters over embellished tale, Tsuyuko is out three minutes after.

"Sweet dreams kiddos."

Chapter End Notes

The way this chapter fought me... I apologize that its been over a month since the last update and its on the shorter side but ghes this was giving me a very hard time lol

anyhow... thanks for reading!

<3

Also this fic and my other naruto fics now has a discord server if anyone wants to stop in, the server is adults only but thats more

for my comfort than anything else :) [My Naruto OC and Works Server](#)

Riverside playgrounds and poisonous plants

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dan is having a hard time, truth be told. His sister is dead, her husband is dead, and his poor niece is not coping well. He's not necessarily coping well either, but the extra bereavement time while appreciative is starting to hinder his ability to move forward. He needs to get them back on track, he needs to get Shizune enrolled in the academy so she has something to do other than grieve. He stops thinking because there is someone in his kitchen, what the...

"Tsunade-shishou said you were still on leave, you really need to do something about your security." Orochimaru's apprentice drolls sardonically, she doesn't even bother to look up from where she is making what appears to be pancakes. Shizune is standing on a stool next to her watching very closely.

"Hello Tsuyuko. I see you're back from the front." He leans against the doorframe crossing his arms over his chest watching the teen closely. Tsuyuko bobs her head half heartedly as she flips a pancake over.

"I am." Her tone is ever so bland. Much like it had been on the front, she looks not as run down as then though. Dan considers his fellow doctor for a moment, like this she looks all of thirteen she is, it's a far cry from the way she looks on the front. Still like a child, but a child who has seen war.

He really does hate that. But Orochimaru had been right, there was nothing to be done about it now. Dan chooses to focus on the matter at hand, why on earth Tsuyuko was here, because frankly he was still under the impression that she merely tolerated his existence.

"Is there any particular reason as to why you've broken into my apartment this morning?" He hedges with a raised brow and a bored tone. Tsuyuko does look up from the griddle then to stare at him.

"Yes, actually. I need to borrow Shizune-chan." She tells him without missing a beat. Shizune looks over her head at her name being mentioned, she doesn't appear startled by this so Tsuyuko must have already brought it up before he walked into the kitchen.

He'd need to go over stranger danger again with Shizune it seemed,

because now he's beginning to question if Tsuyuko actually broke into his apartment.

"You want to borrow my niece?" He reiterates, it gets him one of her famous 'i think your desne' looks but he ignores it. Dan is very used to that look by now.

"That is what I said." Tsuyuko deadpans.

"Why?" This question gets him another dry look, but it doesn't last long because she turns her attention back to the griddle to drop another pancake.

"Because I need you to do something for me that will require you going to the hospital." She tells him ever so blandly.

"And why would I do that?"

"I heard a rumor that someone in the capital has made medical innovation and I think we need it. But no one takes me seriously because I am young." She grumbles, carefully showing Shizune how to drop some batter next to the first pancake.

"You could ask Tsunade." He feels the need to point out, Tsuyuko huffs looking back up at him. Her face still reads 'I think you're stupid' loud and clear but he's still used to it so it goes ignored.

"Tsunade told me that I made her interact with politicians one more time after the last time she would ban me from interesting cases. Also, hospital equipment acquisition is your actual job." Tsuyuko sounds ever so put out by this, Dan snorts he could in fact see Tsunade telling Tsuyuko that. He does however pin her with his own done look.

"I am also a doctor." He intones blandly, trying not to be offended. Her face morphed into an agreeable expression and she nods dismissively.

"Yes, a very good one at that. Yesterday I got asked three times when you would be back, you're elderly civilian patients miss you." She comments airily flipping the pancakes as she goes, not even looking at them. Dan realizes she's probably done this a lot then. However her statement does make him feel guilty.

"Tsuyuko..." He begins, not quite warning, but Tsuyuko just waves him off.

"I told them you were on leave and would be back eventually." She continues directing Shizune to pour more batter after the finished pancakes are removed.

"Ah, I see. Shizune, would you like to spend time with Tsuyuko today?" Dan redirects to his niece who has been awfully quiet this whole time, she glances up, biting her lip.

"I.. I think so.." She manages to offer him a tentative smile. Tsuyuko reaches over and ruffles her hair, smiling softly at his niece.

"Only if you want to, you don't have to." Tsuyuko tells her easily, letting her know it's her choice. Dan appreciates the gesture. Orochimaru's apprentice might have her quirks but she was good with children, especially traumatized kids.

"But you said you need Dan-oji to do something." Shizune whispers, sounding very brave. Tsuyuko just pats her head again.

"I would like for him to, the equipment that I heard the rumor about will be very handy for several different types of things, but will specifically be a good option in the maternity and pediatric departments your uncle has been trying to build up." She explains easily to Shizune, and of course her explanation now has his attention. What exactly has she heard about?

"What is it?"

"Internal imaging equipment. Similar to the large device that cannot be moved that we have but smaller and mobile." Tsuyuko tells him.

"I see. You wouldn't happen to have heard who made it, would you?" He can't help it, he's intrigued.

"I made a very nice thorough packet for you, it's on the table. Now Shizune-chan would you be so kind as to show me where the plates and things are so we can eat all these pancakes." Tsuyuko turns back to Shizune who starts to move to do as asked, but he pushes off the doorframe to intercede.

"No, I'll get all that, you two sit down. Tsuyuko.. I will look at it." He tells her, reaching over Shizune's head to grab the plates from the cabinet next to the stove. Tsuyuko nods.

"Good, there are some other things there that I think you'll find interesting as well." She gives him a quick grin before ushering

Shizune to the table, the plate of pancakes in hand.

“How considerate.” He rolls his eyes at her retreating back.

“You’re welcome.” Tsuyuko quips over her shoulder as she sets the plate down. Dan shakes his head, he brings the plates and utensils over to the table.

Tsuyuko leaves the Kaito apartment an hour or so after breakfast has been eaten and cleaned up. She’s not a menace she made the food, she will in fact clean up after herself. Shizune has a tight grip on her hand which she doesn’t mind, it’s a scary world being all of maybe five years old and now an orphan. Tsuyuko understands that fear all too well.

“Alright Shizune-chan, I need to make one more stop to pick up my brother and then I was thinking about going to that very new park on the riverfront, how does that sound?” Tsuyuko forces a cheer into her voice she doesn’t quite feel, she’s still exhausted from how little sleep she’s been getting lately. But Tsunade told her that she was not allowed at the hospital today and then sensei told her he expected her to enjoy the sunlight.

Which was just rude, she is a ginger! She does not enjoy the sunlight.

“That sounds okay.” Shizune says timidly, so unsure of herself. Tsuyuko hums.

“Sweet, Kakashi-kun is a little younger than you but he’s a pretty smart kid so you two should be on par in terms of things to talk about.”

“Okay.”

Shizune is quiet, Tsuyuko can see how she’ll become who she remembered from the story. Her disposition was just like this it seemed. Tsuyuko reaches over and ruffles the top of the little girl’s head.

“Come on, it will be fun.”

Their arrival at the Hatake house is met with little fanfare, by little

Tsuyuko actually means a giant dog knocking her over and licking her face but she's trying to be chill about it. "Hello again Maiko." She gently pushes the dog's snout away from her face before she stands up dusting off her skirt to find Sakumo standing in the doorway, arms crossed and smirking at her.

He must have just gotten back from his own post. How unfortunate she is still stealing Kakashi for the morning.

"Good morning Tsuyuko-chan." Sakumo grins at her all teeth, but she can see the circles under his eyes loud and clear. Oh good he won't object then to her taking Kakashi for a few hours. Fantastic.

"You as well Sakumo. I see you've just gotten back." She points out gesturing loosely to his rumbled look, he must have just gotten up. The summons is still trying to gain her attention but she is very used to ignoring them.

"Last night. Maiko, heel, now. Who do you have with you?" Sakumo's commanding voice has the dog sitting back and sulking. Tsuyuko sighs, she reaches for Shizune and gently guides her to stand in front of her.

"This is Shizune. She is Kaito Dan's niece." She tells Sakumo, the jounin nods, that was apparently enough of an introduction for him.

"I see, well Kakashi is finishing his breakfast, you are welcome to come in and join him.

"Sweet, come along Shizune-chan. We ate already but I could make tea. Is Suyuri-san home?"

"You just missed her, which I suspect you knew." He levels her with an unimpressed look, to which she only shrugs. Tsuyuko actually hadn't checked, she had fully expected to interact with Suyuri if she had too. How was she supposed to know Sakumo was back?

"I didn't check. Tea?" She hedges again, this time pushing Shizune up the steps and into the house with her.

"Sure. You can tell me what your plan is so I know where my kids will be." Sakumo replies easily walking in behind them, Maiko coming in last.

"If you insist. Are there any more dogs going to jump on me?" Tsuyuko finds herself asking while she bends down to take her shoes

off. Shizune follows in step quietly. Sakumo shakes his head.

“No. The others are still in the summoning realm. Maiko is only here for training.”

“Ah, good.” She stands back up examining the entrance on habit, not yet moving further into the house.

“What’s this I hear about you becoming a tokubetsu jounin?” Sakumo asks carefully. Tsuyuko is sure she makes a face.

“It’s a thing that happened and I don’t necessarily care about it.”

“I should have expected that answer.” He sighs at her. Tsuyuko shrugs, walking ahead to find her brother. He is in fact sitting at the table eating what appears to be oatmeal.

Tsuyuko stops just behind him, letting her suppressed chakra flicker back into existence like an alarm announcing her presence. Kakashi shoots up in his seat, standing on the chair to be almost eye level with her.

“Tsuyu-nee-chan!” He exclaims quite happily and she smiles freely in response. Reaching out to ruffle his fluffy hair without a second thought.

“Kakashi-kun!” She cheers, plucking him from the chair and pulling him into a hug. The little boy goes practically limp on her arms but does wrap his arms back around her shoulder and nuzzles his maskless face into her shoulder.

“What are you doing here?” He pulls away to ask.

“Kidnapping you in a bit after some tea, there is a very cool park that looks at a river and I want to check it out. I hear it has swings. And behind it poisonous plants that need to be investigated.” She tells him as she adjusts so he’s situated on her hip for better support. Kakashi eyes her suspiciously.

“You’re not going to eat them again are you?”

“Hmm, I might.” She teases. It gets a gasp from poor Shizune

“You can’t, that’s dangerous!” She exclaims.

“Don’t worry about Tsuyuko, she’s a poison master kid.” Sakumo enters the kitchen then, he pats Shizune’s head before stepping around

her and Kakashi to grab the kettle.

“Still... Poisonous plants are dangerous, Dan-oji said to be very careful when interacting with them.” Shizune’s lip wobbles, Tsuyuko hums as her brother regards the girl curiously.

“He’s right, you should be very careful. I’m mostly immune to their effects now, so I’ll be okay.” She won’t be accused of going over Dan’s head, and really it was good advice. Other people who did not have her experience should in fact be very careful around poisonous plants.

“If you say so..” Shizune remains unsure, Kakashi pokes Tsuyuko in the cheek and she sets him down. He walks over to Shizune and starts telling her that it's fine and Tsuyuko promptly tunes both children out to look at Sakumo who has been staring at her for the last two minutes.

“So the riverfront park and poisonous plants, anything else?” He questions once he knows he has her attention. Tsuyuko shakes her head no, walking over to join him and take the kettle from his hands. She would make the tea.

“Hmmm, not at the moment, no. Nawaki will probably join us at some point.” She tells him easily, while leaning up to grab the tea she knows he prefers and the kind she and Kakashi like as well as something she thinks will suit Shizune. Suyuri and her would forever remain on odd terms but the woman at least had impeccable taste when it came to a tea collection.

“I suppose that’s fine. I have a report to write.” Sakumo turns to lean against the counter keeping one eye on her as she goes about setting up tea cups and the other trained on the kids who she still has tuned out.

“Fun. Oh, can you tell Inoichi to leave me alone the next time you see him.” Tsuyukp doesn’t look away from the kettle, but she can feel the reluctant look on Sakumo’s face by the way he sighs.

“What did he do now?” He asks carefully. Tsuyuko hums, it was a rather long list of grievances but for now she’ll stick with the two that were annoying her the most currently.

“Talked to me like a child and has continued to be annoying since. I don’t need him to constantly try to psychoanalyze my every move. I’m not an idiot and will deal with a shrink if I need one.” She intones as blandly as she can. Inoichi’s pompous attitude and the constant prying

is getting on her last nerve. Since he would not let it go when she asked him to, she is not above going over his head to his jounin sensei.

Sakumo sighs again, but pats her shoulder so she knows he's heard her.

"Ahh.. I'll talk to him."

"Thank you." Tsuyuko bobs her head, but keeps her attention on the kettle as she pour the water into each cup. The kids sound like they're getting along fine behind her even if she's not particularly paying attention to what is being said. Sakumo nods, she notes from the corner of her eye but he says nothing else.

Tsuyuko goes about her set task quietly.

Tsuyuko is nose deep in explaining about the foliage around the park to her two wards for the day when a bug crawls up her arm. She stares at the small black creature for a very long moment, then glances up and around the area where she finds a kid probably the same age as Asuma-kun standing a few paces behind them, obviously trying to listen to her explanation. Behind the kid is a fellow shinobi who is probably her and Tsume's age... well he'll either interact if he wants to or not, but she will in fact call out to the kid.

"Do you want to hear more about the plants?"

"I would like that." The kid says simply and Tsuyuko, not one to deny anyone an education, waves them over. She very carefully picks the little bug off her arm and sets it back on the kids hand when they come and stand next to her.

"I'm sorry." They say, but she waves it off too.

"Not a big deal, I don't mind then, but I don't prefer them to crawl on my skin."

"I see. I will make sure they don't touch your skin."

"Thank you Aburame-kun."

"Shiori, des, Yasha-san right?"

“Unhuh, you can call me Tsuyuko tho. Most do. Now, this plant here is very poisonous to people if consumed, but it’s actually great for external salvants.” She continues her explanation easily, the three children nod their heads along at appropriate intervals.

It is afterwards when the three have run off to do normal kid things does the other shinobi approach her. Oh, she knows him, not well but they were actually stationed together during her first deployment. Aburame Shibi, he’s in the same year as Shikaku.. she thinks. Tsuyuko is actually terrible at remembering what happened to the rest of the parent gen after she graduated from the academy. Aren’t he and Tsume on a team together?

She hasn’t the slightest clue.

“Thank you.” He intones in almost monotone. Tsuyuko raises her brow at him.

“For what?” She can’t think of any reason he’d have to say thank you to her.

“You were kind to my sister.”

“Oh, Shiori-chan? I don’t mind kids.”

“Most people mind bugs.” He states dryly.

“Eh.. they don’t bother me. She wanted to learn, who was I to tell her no.” Tsuyuko shrugs. It’s not a big deal.

“I suppose that is a fair assessment.”

“I thought so too. Oh, hey Kakashi don’t throw dirt, this isn’t a battlefield you brat!” Tsuyuko turns to shout at her brother who glances up and fucking shrugs at her. She swears... if he weren’t her brother she might knock him into a tree. For as cute as he was he was certainly coming into his personality.

Surprisingly Shibi snorts from where he is standing. Tsuyuko isn’t sure she wants to know what he finds funny. Instead she keeps her eyes trained on the kids, as more random children seem to join them in their game of ninja.

“They won’t think it’s so fun in a few years.” He mumbles, and that does get a raised brow from her, who knew young Shibi was such a pessimist.

“For sure. But maybe by then the war will be over.” She mumbles, sage she hopes it will be. She does not want Kakashi anywhere near a battlefield while he’s still a little kid.

“You are more optimistic than you were on the front.”

“I don’t recall us interacting much during that round of deployment.”

“We did not. But I observed. You were very brash, but understandably so. That deployment was not good.” His face is sullen, more so than most shinobi allowed and it comes flooding back to her.

She never treated Shibi, he was a model shinobi who never got injured... However, one of his squad mates was one of her patients who died of the virus.

“No... I’m sorry about your teammate.” Tsuyuko manages softly. Shibi nods his head accepting the platitudes easily enough.

“As I am yours.” He returns, Tsuyuko nods numbly.

“War sucks.” She grumbles, crossing her arms over her chest, huffing slightly. Shibi nods in agreement:

“Indeed.”

They watch the kids play silently afterwards. Nothing more to say and neither willing to fill the air with idle chitchat. Not that she minds, it was nice not trying to have to talk, to fake pleasantries that she didn’t really have the motivation to care about.

Chapter End Notes

In which Tsuyuko is a very quirky girl lol

<3

Half a year gone, another battle had..

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Half a year goes by, there are small courier missions here and there, a few skirmishes that Tsuyuka, Nawaki and Minato participate in, short stints of deployment that keep them out of the village for weeks at time. Before Tsuyuko knows it her birthday has come and gone, Minato has been promoted to full jounin, and Shizune has started the academy. She never expected that Dan's niece would become so attached to her but she also hasn't tried to hinder the duck-like attachment either. Currently she'd give anything to be back in the village instead of where she currently stands.

Another battlefield that she is about to demolish.

For as cute and unassuming as Tsuyuko is, she is still a shinobi, still just as capable as the rest of her generation - she is still Orochimaru's apprentice.

"That was really rude of you, I hope you're prepared to deal with the consequences of hurting my teammates." She chides, standing in the dust that Minato had kicked up while hauling himself and Nawaki off the field. They would both only get in the way in their current state.

"Oh yeah, what's one little girl going to do against an entire Iwa platoon." Some nameless, faceless really, shinobi sneers from across the field.

"Kill you obviously." Tsuyuko is not one for battlefield barbs, she finds the pointless, she gets to the point. As far as she is concerned she is staring at a graveyard.

"Well aren't you an arrogant little girl."

"It's only arrogance if I can't back it up." Tsuyuko snaps one of her poison smoke flash bombs off her belt. She hurls it at their feet, it ignites as soon as it touches the ground.

For a moment no one moves, Tsuyuko uses their disbelief against them. She rakes a sharp tooth over her thumb, drawing blood within a millisecond and swipes the blood across her palm. Planting her hand in the rubbed dirt, the ground rumbles under her feet as smoke engulfs the battlefield. Tsuyuko doesn't sway as she rises above the

smoke, standing from the summoning position, wind blowing through her braided pigtails.

‘Hsss, you are not Orochimaru, what trouble have you found yourself in that you dare summon me’ Manda hisses, but without malice, Tsuyuko grins, considering it a win. She’d been meaning to summon the large battle snake that was assigned to her, Lady Naomi, but Manda would work too. In fact he was probably the better choice because he was very distinctly known to belong to Orochimaru.

“See for yourself.” She gestures to the giant under her feet, maliciously grinning at the men below.

‘Ahss, a battlefield, are you hurt Tsuyuko-hime?’ Manda speaks, his voice echoes around the valley. Tsuyuko shakes her head. She’s not hurt, she took her lesson from Tsunade very seriously.

“I am not, but they hurt Minato and Nawaki.” She crouches on his head to talk, no point to yell at the poor old bastard.

‘Oh, did they now?’ Manda does not sound impressed, he was more tame for her. It miffed Orochimaru intensely. She has no idea what she did any differently than him.

“Mhmm, I sent Minato and Nawaki away. It’s just you and I now, backup is on the way- but I was thinking we should make it easier for them when they arrive. Say fifty less shinobi than there are now.” She thinks it’s a decent number, surely enough food to appease the giant serpent. Manda’s mouth opens, snake grin, he seems pleased by the arrangement.

‘Yesss, I think that can be arranged. I’m going to eat them.’ He tells her and Tsuyuko does not object, she is fine with that.

“Do you see the one in the back, yellow coat, he’s their commander- we need him alive, but feel free to devour the others.” She gestures to the shinobi they need alive, Fugaku had been very clear when he sent them out. The camp they were at currently want this one shinobi for interrogation.

‘Very well.’

“Thank you Manda-sama.” Tsuyuko stands back to her full height.

The Iwa platoon has seemed to regain their composure by the time the smoke clears, but some are still shaking in their boots. They are the

first to be struck by Manda's tail, the giant serpent sends them flying into the near cliffside.

"That's ten. Forty more to go."

'I can count brat'

Tsuyuko smirks, bending down to pat the snake's head. "Good job."

Manda hisses, and she counts it as a win.

"You've got to be kidding me, that little brat has a summon like this! Stop them!"

"...You have got to be kidding me." The commander stares straight at her, disbelief clouding their features. Tsuyuko all of fourteen smirks.

"Did you realize who I am?" She mocks, sickly sweet and poised.

"Retreat! She's that bastard Orochimaru's apprentice!"

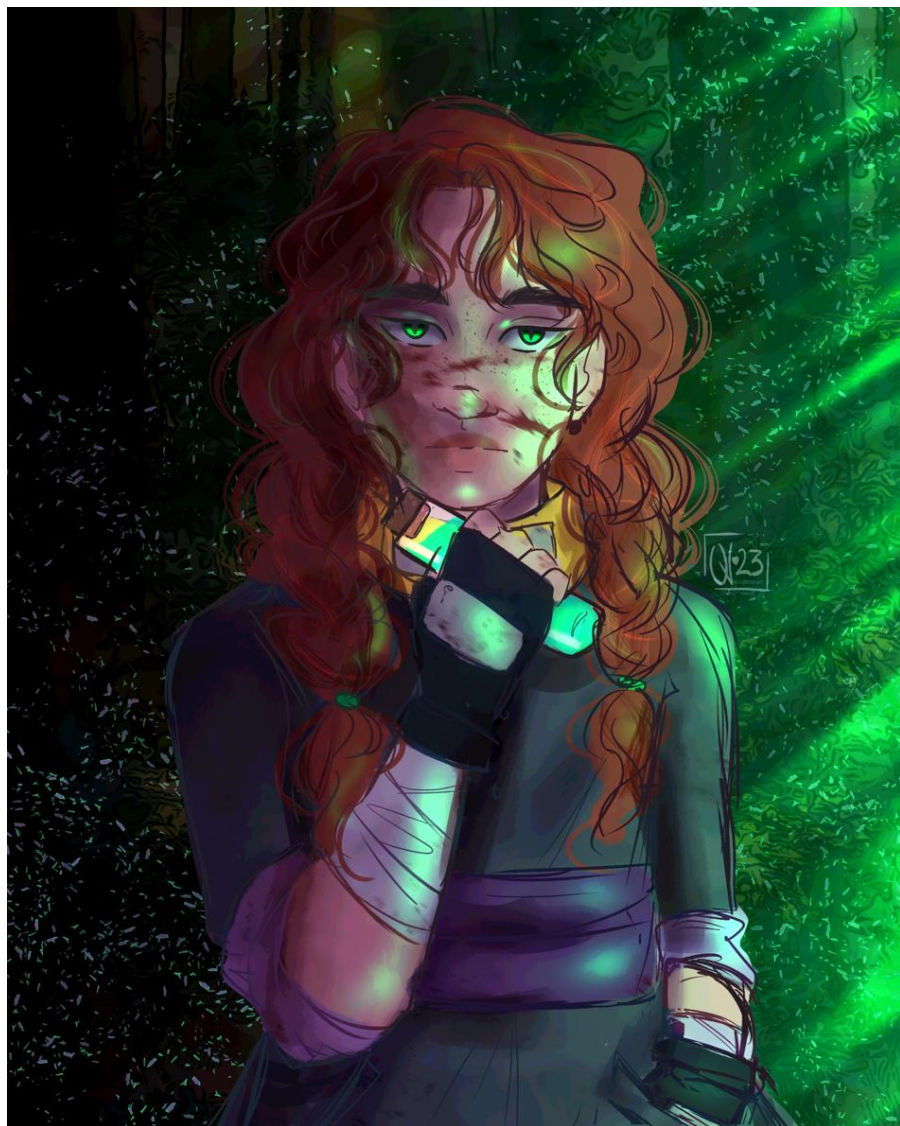
"Too late for that." Manda swipes his long tail across the battlefield sending Iwa shinobi flying. He takes out another ten shinobi with the next downward bash of his tail.

Tsuyuko reaches into her weapons pouch and pulls out a kunai already secured with a poison laced paper bomb. She flings it at the group that has started and will fail to retreat. It ignites in bright fluorescent green smoke and flame.

The battle over before it truly has a chance to begin. She hopes they enjoy the taste of their own blood and bile. Because she has no more time to waste on them. No more patience to give.

Nawaki is down. The last she'd seen there was a kunai dug into his back, and she didn't know where it was or what damage it had done. Tsuyuko watches with absolutely no regret, no empathy as the Iwa platoon scratches at their eyes and claws their own throats.

It's the bare minimum of what they deserved for harming her best friend.



When Fugaku arrives, with another jounin and two chunin to aid Tsuyuko at the request of a disheveled Minato and a *wounded* Senju Nawaki he is expecting to find a bloodbath. In the last year and a half he has become reluctantly well acquainted with Team Orochimaru. He knows very well how precious Tsuyuko's teammates are to her, he knows exactly what she is capable of and knows she is at her core a no hold bar shinobi. He is expecting a bloodbath.

The sight still shocks him.

For a kunoichi, trained as a field doctor, all of fourteen seeing her standing alone on a battlefield that has been leveled over the one shinobi they needed alive is a sight to behold. Tsuyuko doesn't turn to acknowledge him when they arrive, her eyes remain trained on the Iwa commander at her feet. He is missing both of his arms at what appears to be the result of dotun use.

"How are my teammates?" Is the very first words she speaks to him, voice cold and harsh. Fugaku clamps his hand down on her shoulder, her KI is still ravenging, he can tell by the way it seems to affect the two chunin behind him. They do not approach her like he had. They do not even dare.

"Minato is fine baring mild chakra exhaustion and a sprained wrist. Nawaki's condition is more complicated, he is stable and alive, but he is unconscious." He gives the report. Tsuyuko nods her head and he knows what she'll ask about next. Fugaku dreads the question.

"I see. The kunai?"

"It nicked his spine, Tsuyuko." He however will not lie to her. Her expression, she's too expressive for a shinobi, shifts, dread apparent on her face.

"Fuck. I need.." He nods at the desperation in her voice, he gets it, he understands.

"Go, take the chunin with you, we can handle this here." Fugaku is not a kind man, not really, in fact Tsuyuko herself had once called him a surly bastard to his face, but he was also not unkind. He understands how it feels to be in her position.

"Thank you. He's alive, knocked unconscious and I crushed his arms. He threw that bloody kunai to begin with, let him know he's only alive because you asked me to make sure not to kill him." She says ever so flippantly as she finally turns away from the Iwa commander to stalk almost predatory towards the chunin.

"I'll be sure to mention it." He smirks, turning his attention to the only alive enemy left on this field. To think this was her mercy.

The med tent is quiet when Tsuyuko arrives, still covered in battlefield grime. Minato is in a chair hunched over at Nawaki's makeshift

bedside. He looks no worse for wear than he had earlier, he stirs as she approaches lifting his head to stare almost blankly at her. She walks over and pats his head to which he leans into her touch. Poor thing.

“Can you go get me a change of clothes from our tent?” She asks softly, Minato thankfully doesn’t protest and leaves a second later.

Tsuyuko draws the curtain after he leaves, she grabs the chart that’s been taken to read over it. Nawaki is still sound asleep, for now she’ll let him rest. She puts on gloves and does her own checks of his condition.

What she finds is what she expects. Chakra exhaustion, bruised ribs, a few various scrapes here and there, but worst of all his spinal injury. It’s not the first one sustained during his career, no that in fact happened during their first ever mission out of the village. If she weren’t the doctor she is this would be a career ending injury for her teammate, just like it would have been back then. Tsuyuko knows there is a window before she won’t be able to repair what’s been done, so she pulls her hair into a messy bun and gets to work.

It doesn’t take long, iryo-ninjutsu is a miracle worker at times. She’s so grateful to have it as a tool in her arsenal. Paired with her extensive medical experience and knowledge from her first life, repairing the arguably small impact point is child’s play. Tsuyuko is done before Minato returns, although she’s willing to bet he fell asleep in their tent and she won’t hold that against him. She wished she could be asleep right now instead of here.

Instead of having to stand in the face of another impossible decision. Because she really wished to be anywhere else than here at the moment. Staring at her best friend’s unconscious body, his medical chart in her hand, still covered in the battle that almost ended his life. How much more of this could they take? How much more were they expected to give?

Tsuyuko has no idea how much more she can give. This has to end soon, they cannot keep on like this.

She considers Nawaki’s chart. Considers what she’d discovered among the corpses, and she makes a decision. Looks like they were going to have to use another one of their last resort plans. She will not lose both of them to this damn war. She will not let one man’s greed take everything from her. Tsuyuko sighs before grabbing a red pen and

writes a new note on his chart.

Senju Nawaki. Partial paralysis. Unfit for combat.

Chapter End Notes

:)

The burden belongs to me...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When Nawaki wakes up he is in a Konoha hospital room. When the fuck had... how in the seven hells had he gotten here? He was just on a battlefield, with Tsuyuko and Minato when.. His memory comes back in full force, so hard that it makes him nauseous. Something fuzzy and green is shoved in his face and he realizes a moment later it's Tsuyuko's hand. Oh good, she's alive.

"Don't move. Your spinal cord was nicked during the fight, it is still healing." Her voice has lost all normal chipper air, this is his teammate at her absolutely worst. Full doctor mode, Nawaki groans but does as instructed.

"Will I still be able to fight?" He asks after a moment. Tsuyuko's face sours like she's eaten something rotten.

"No. I have marked you unfit for combat, effective immediately. You've had two major spinal injuries in less than five years Nawaki. A third will permanently paralyze you." She sounds so done, so absolutely broken. Nawaki wishes so badly to reach for her, to reassure that he will be fine and she needn't worry so much... but considering the circumstances he doesn't think it will go over well.

"Am I paralyzed now?" He asks softly, glancing up at the ceiling to not have to look at her face.

"No... You are very lucky that I am exceptional at what I do. You will walk again, in a few weeks after therapy and rest. But you will need a crutch for sometime, I'm thinking of a *yellow* one." She doesn't look at him as she does routine checks, but he glances back at her when she says one of their many code words.

So it came to that then.

"How many?" He asks almost dejectedly.

"Five, they are all dead, they saw you Nawa... they saw.. I can't keep doing this." Tsuyuko whispers, desperately as tears slip down her face. Crying without sound. He would reach out and grab her hand but she told him to be still and he wouldn't go against that. Instead he focuses

on what she has said, what she hasn't said, ROOT saw him use the mokuton, saw him use it to shield Minato to shield her. His biggest downfall will always be his care for his teammates. It has now become a hindrance to their mission. Nawaki grits his teeth.

He wants to be mad, to be mad at Tsuyuko for making this decision, for forcing this lie on him. But... he'd agreed to it originally and he couldn't fault her for putting their mission first. For making sure he lives long enough to see Himura again. Because he knows in the end, the burden of this, the burden of Himura's 'death' it's not his, it has always been hers. It will always be hers. She's their captain, despite what people may think, she calls the shots and they follow suit.

It's the only way they can survive.

"I will be able to walk with a crutch, I don't want yellow, can it be green?" He asks instead, letting her know he accepts. He'll play along. Tsuyuko wipes her eyes and huffs.

"After all the grief you've given me I might make it pink." She teases, voice only slightly hoarse. Nawaki grins.

"I like pink." She scoffs at him, crossing her arms over her chest.

"I'll put the order in tonight for it. On a serious note, you will experience some discomfort and you might have nerve flare ups. Nawaki I did repair the damage, but I can't actually know if it was enough. Partial paralysis could still occur so if you start noticing symptoms..." Tsuyuko trails off, she sets his chart back at the end of the bed for the nursing staff.

"I'll let you know immediately." He keeps his voice low matching her quiet tone, regardless that he can see the privacy slip active in her pocket. Tsuyuko nods.

"Good. Now, try to move your toes." Tsuyuko is back to her charming doctor self with her no nonsense attitude and horrible bedside manner, Nawaki grins happily and does as instructed.

Thankfully he can in fact feel his toes. But his hip throbs when he does it, which doesn't feel great. He tells Tsuyuko who nods. "Sciatic pain, to be expected, probably for a while. I can write you a prescription for it if it becomes too much."

"So it's normal?" He asks for clarification, Tsuyuko nods.

“Most likely. I’ll take another look at it once you start therapy.” She tells him mildly as she grabs his chart to make a note on it.

“Do I actually need that?” Or is it just for the farce they’re about to put on. Nawaki tries not to think bitterly. Tsuyuko bobs her head.

“Yes, actually. Iryo-ninjutsu is a marvel, and it can do so much, but it is not infallible and you still need to restore the strength to that area of your back naturally. Nawaki you’ve had two injuries like this, two, if you were anyone else you’d be dead.” She tells him, voice cracking ever so slightly. Nawaki remembers that in another life she’s seen these injuries kill him.. he reaches out and takes her hand giving it a quick squeeze.

“Huh. Who is going to oversee it?” He questions, Tsuyuko gives him a look that loudly proclaims I think you’re a dumbass before answering his question.

“Me, who else?”

“Do you qualify as a physical therapist?” He raises a brow, teasing, but Tsuyuko just scowls at him.

“In this life I do.” She grumbles.

“You’re more prickly than normal, what’s going on?”

“My teammate is in a hospital bed, and I’m tired.. I’m so very tired.” She admits rather reluctantly after a moment, taking a seat at the foot of his bed letting his chart sit in her lap.

“I’m sorry.” He moves his knee under the cover to knock into her side, Tsuyuko smiles fairly as she absently pats the top of his covers.

“Not your fault, you didn’t ask to be injured.” She shrugs, turning to look out the window. Nawaki leans back in the bed. It occurs to him then that he used the mokuton to protect Minato..

“Yea... did Minato...” He trails off, not really wanting to ask aloud even with the privacy seal still active. Tsuyuko shrugs again.

“If he did, he has not asked me about it.”

“I see. Does my sister know I’m here?” He thinks probably not since she hasn’t thrown the doors open yet to see him, but she could also be busy so he can’t be too sure. Tsuyuko smirks at him.

“You lucked out and she is on a mission with Jiraiya.” She informs him ever so bluntly. Nawaki lets out a sigh he hadn’t realized he’s been holding, well little mercies he supposed.

“Thank the sage.”

“Indeed.”

Hiruzen is having a very long day when Orochimaru’s apprentice arrives. The girl looks like he feels, he sighs but gestures for her to close the door. Tsuyuko wordlessly grabs the eclectic kettle and two cups, she precures water from a scroll and pours it into the kettle before plugging the cord into the wall. He should get a sink put in here, he thinks blandly watching the tokubetsu jounin go about her ritual tea making for their meetings.

It isn’t until the tea is made and set before him that she opens her mouth to speak. “We need to adjust the timeline, Sandaime-sama. I took out five marked shinobi wearing enemy colors on the battlefield during my last short deployment.” She informs him immediately, Hiruzen sighs rubbing a hand over his face.

The last scroll he’d received from Himura had not been well met, he too would agree that they needed to escalate this. But with the war... It was a hard play, even his own students were at a standstill with whatever they were trying to do to knock Danzo off the board.

“I agree with you Tsuyuko-kun, but at the moment I do not have a way to make that happen delicately.” He tells her plainly, there was no way to address the issue head on without eliciting panic. Danzo knew what he was doing when he made this war happen, he knew it would buy him more time. If he suspected that Hiruzen was on to him and believed he’d actually follow through with his earlier threat... he’d played his cards right. Currently Hiruzen’s hands are tired. Tsuyuko nods her head as if that was what she’d expected.

“I figured... There are more reports of missing kids and small viruses wiping out tiny towns on the borders. I don’t know how much more the people of the land of fire believe it is the war. Bodies are appearing that their cause of death does not match the lie originally given.” Tsuyuko does not look pleased, she looks nearly broken. Hiruzen almost regrets giving her this job.

Except she had taken it willingly, and had offered to do it. Because she was too expensive for a shonobi no one would ever expect her to be able to pull off this type of specialist work. The truth was, Tsuyuko was exactly the right amount of expensive she needed to be at any given moment. She was and will remain an exceptional multi talented shinobi who had earned her rank and perhaps deserved a promotion to full jounin.

“Yes, quite concerning.” He placates not really having anything to add to her statement. Of course that does nothing to appease the teen and she paces teacup still in hand.

“We’re running out of time. The children that are still alive are running out of time, how much more of their blood will stain my hands before this is over.” Her words still him to his very core, did she truly believe that he was going to allow her to take the blame for this?

Knowing about something does not make her responsible for it. A matter of fact is that he knows she would have long ago tried to poison Danzo, had he not told her they had to wait. The state of the village was too fragile to lose Danzo right now and he still didn’t know how many of his old friend’s drones had infiltrated his ANBU. Once he gets all of those numbers from Himura, once they have most of the bases as known locations, then they could remove Danzo from play. Preferably before he hands the hat to Orochimaru because he wants everything to be neatly done at that point. But in the meantime the lives lost because they have to play the long game are not her burden.

They’re his. They will always be his.

“Tsuyuko-kun, whatever happens to those children, to any children that ROOT has taken is not your burden. It will be mine alone.” He tells her seriously, Tsuyuko glances away obviously not taking him seriously. She sighs, rubbing her hand over her face before nodding.

“I may have figured out the disposal method.” She changes the subjects and he allows it.

“Walk me through what you have.” He gestures for her to sit, picking up his tea to take a sip. Tsuyuko nods, sitting quietly across from him.

“Hai, Hokage-sama.”

Orochimaru frowns when Tsuyuko trudges into their home. She looks, well frankly she looks terrible. He is about to open his mouth to ask if she is alright when she walks straight into him, burrowing her face into his sternum and wrapping her arms around him and just hugs him. He sighs, patting her head before letting his arms gently encase his daughter.

“Do you want to talk about it?” He thinks the answer will be no, Tsuyuko did not like to talk about anything relating to herself these days. But he asks to make sure, to give her the opportunity.

“No.. I don’t.” She mumbles into his shirt. Orochimaru hums.

“I see. Would you like me to tell you about my current research instead.” He offers an alternative, Tsuyuko perks up lifting her face off his chest to look up at him with bright warning green eyes.

“Yes please.” She chirps, here he chuckles giving her hair one more pat before she pulls away to go sit at the table. Orochimaru rolls his eyes when she isn’t looking.

He grabs a snack from the counter and brings it over to the table to share. Tsuyuko lays her head on her arms and he begins with the driest possible explanation possible in hope to bore her to sleep. If his daughter realizes what he is doing she doesn’t point it out.

Tsuyuko is asleep by the time he reaches the testing phase, he shakes his head. It’s been a while since he’s carried her off to bed, but he will not let her sleep in such a horrible position so he heaves himself up and then carefully picks her up out of the chair. She is heavier than she was when she was younger which is expected however also concerning because it is not by too much, Orochimaru can’t help but to scowl.

He needs this blasted war to end. Maybe it’s time to reevaluate their plan.

Chapter End Notes

Little celebrations...

Chapter Notes

some time has passed in the story between the last chapter and this one <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tsuyuko, for the most part, has absolutely no fucking clue how she ended getting roped into- well whatever the hell was going on currently at the Yamanaka clan compound. While Inoichi had calmed the fuck down over the last few months, he was still on her nerves, especially now that Nawaki has been benched indefinitely. Inoichi has been smothering in his concern, and asinine in his delivery of it thus far.

She shouldn't be here.

Yet she doesn't try to leave either, Tsume is around, drunk of all things and she feels weird about leaving her fellow kunoichi alone in a clan compound that's not her own. To be fair, most of their fellow shinobi were under the influence to some extent. This must have been a post deployment party, she realizes once she takes note of the shinobi around her. She'd seen most of them at the last camp she'd been temporarily stationed at. Tsuyuko bites the inside of her cheek.

She really should go home. She should find Tsume and drag the other girl giggling back to the Inuzuka compound. Yet... she lingers.

The hint of normalcy, the hint of what she would consider normal teenage behavior and rebellion is so refreshing she can't pull herself away from it.

"Don't let Inoichi catch you making that face." Shikaku appears next to her, brow raised, arms crossed over his chest. Trying hard to appear disinterested and bored, but he too hadn't left so Tsuyuko can guess he probably felt similar. She huffs in exasperation.

"If he didn't want me making faces at drunk shinobi then he shouldn't have invited Tsume who in turn drugged me along." Tsuyuko mutters, scowling at nothing as she kicks the dirt. She swears Inoichi is absolutely the worst friend.

He's a great friend, but she refuses to be micromanaged and she is

coping with everything just fine damnit!

“She’s having a good time.”

“It only looks that way because she’s drunk.” She grumbles petulantly. Where had the alcohol even come from? They were at war, alcohol was a scarce resource currently. Tsuyuko keeps scowling, this is so stupid she should go home.

“Come on, I’ll help you wrangle her back to the Inuzuka compound and then walk you home. You look miserable.” He points out blandly. Tsuyuko huffs once more.

“I am. But you don’t have to do that.” She glances back to where Tsume is challenging another special jounin to an arm wrestling match. She really should stop her and take her home...

“It’s fine, let’s go get your friend.” Shikaku smiles softly at her, not that she notices, no of course she doesn’t notice how soft his face gets when he looks at her. Tsuyuko is oblivious, she has terrible social awareness according to some people... Of course she notices, she just tries hard to pretend she doesn’t.

“Thanks Shikaku.”

“Don’t mention it.”

Getting Tsume home is, well, it’s something and they get there eventually. Kugo is coming in from, well Tsuyuko actually doesn’t know what he does now that he’s been retired. She does check ups with him but usually doesn’t ask him about his personal affairs. He sighs loudly when he sees them, easily wrangling his sister from her and Shikaku and throwing the drunk teen over his shoulder like it’s nothing. Tsuyuko eyes him for how strenuous the whole thing looked but he appears otherwise unbothered so she’ll let it go.

“Thanks for bringing her home.” Kugo pats her head with his free hand, Tsuyuko pouts at him.

“No problem. Just make sure she gets lots of water tonight and she’ll probably have a headache from the pits itself tomorrow.” Tsuyuko tells him, swatting his hand off her head.

“Noted. Thanks kid.”

“Have a good evening Kugo.”

“You too kid... make smart choices.” He says after narrowing his eyes at Shikaku, Tsuyuko ignores the implications of what the jounin said and grabs Shikaku by the sleeve to pull him along.

Shikaku is silent as they walk through the markets that lead back to the old Yashagorou estate, Tsuyuko can see that something is on his mind but she isn't sure she wants to ask. He couldn't possibly be so bothered by what Kugo had said, surely he knows the Inuzuka man is an absolute moron.

“Shikaku, are you okay?” Tsuyuko stops to ask, he stops and raises a brow at her.

“Yea, why wouldn't I be?” He quires back at her. Tsuyuko shrugs, she looks away from him to consider the night crowd. The market district is an empty place currently. It's a little weird.

“You're very quiet.” She draws carefully, letting her eyes drift back to him. Shikaku just rolls his shoulders, he glances up at the moon.

“So are you.” He points out lazily. Tsuyuko hums, there wasn't a lot to say to that. She was quiet.

“I guess that's fair.”

They continue the walk through the market in silence. Tsuyuko lets her mind wander, she couldn't help but to wonder when his clan would start pushing for him to get married. The Ino-Shika-Cho trio of this generation were older than her by a few years, they would be expected to take wives and start trying to have heirs in the near future. War be damned, she knew how clan elders thought, it was always about preserving the clan.

“Now what are you thinking about?” Shikaku drawls slowly, lazily, but she can see the desire to know behind thinly veiled indifference. Tsuyuko shrugs, the chill of the night air starting to get to her.

“Has your clan started asking you when you're going to get married?” She asks, finding no reason to lie. He'd either answer her or he wouldn't. Shikaku stops in his tracks, which in itself is an answer to her, but Tsuyuko gives him a moment to tell her himself.

“They have...” He starts, trailing off as if there is more to it. Tsuyuko scowls, she grabs his sleeve again and steers them over to a bench that is nestled between two market stalls a little off the main street.

“Dumb, there is a war going on.” She grumbles, Shikaku shrugs, taking a seat on the bench. Tsuyuko contemplates pacing but after a second decides to sit next to him.

“It was recently, Inoichi started getting pressured about it after our first stint on the fronts.” Shikaku tells her once she has sat down.. Well she supposed that was better, but the idea that his clan was beginning to pressure him to get married made her skin crawl.

In the safety of her own thoughts she is willing to admit that she has always had a crush on him. In another life he'd been one of her favorites of the parent generation, and then as she has lived this life... well they've always been close, especially for two shinobi who were not on a team together.

“Is that why he's been so annoying lately?” She scowls if that was the case she's going to berate Inoichi so hard the next time she sees him, cause if he's been projecting his crap on her she really should put a mild laxative in his food or something. Shikaku snorts.

“Probably. Why did you ask?” He questions, to which she really has no idea how to answer, because she is supposed to tell him it's because she doesn't like the idea of him getting married to someone not her. Tsuyuko shrugs.

“Curious I guess.”

“Well, for now I'm in the clear, but I've been warned that if I don't find a wife by the time I'm twenty the clan will set something up.” Shikaku tells her that after a moment, Tsuyuko bites the inside of her lip.

“Eww.. Is there anyone you'd want to be your wife?” She really shouldn't ask. It's impolite or something maybe.. She of course asks anyway.

“Yes, but I don't know if now is the time to bring it up. There is a war going on afterall.” he says with a teasing grin, Tsuyuko is half tempted to pinch him. Instead she leans back.

“Well played...” She trails off as her mind wanders again. Now thinking about who would become Shikaku's wife in this life, briefly

her thoughts drift to his canon wife Yoshino, a fellow kunoichi that she had no real issue with. But she can't picture it since from every interaction the two have ever had in this life it hasn't gone well.. Yoshino really didn't like Shikaku.

Sage, she'd hate for him to end up with her considering. She wonders if that had been how it was in the story or if that was specific to this life. Who knows.. Tsuyuko tries to think of other potential prospects, but everyone draws a blank or makes her mad.

"Why the long face?" Shikaku nudges his shoulder against hers.

"The idea of your future wife is irritating me." She admits sullenly after a moment, kicking a rock as if to make her point. Tsuyuko knows if she looks at Shikaku his brow will be raised, oh look his perfectly groomed brow is in fact raised.

"Why?" He sounds almost confused. Like he can't possibly figure out why it would bother her... maybe she had been reading the room wrong all along. Tsuyuko swallows hard, clenching her fist in her oversized sweater sleeves, is she really about to let her no filter get the best of her?

"Because... I guess I thought you and I would end up together." Apparently so, but she doesn't regret it.

Tsuyuko waits a minute before looking at Shikaku again, his mouth is slightly open but apparently he is too stunned to speak. She pokes his arm, he shuts his mouth, shakes his head and chuckles before asking.

"How do you know it's not you that I'm thinking about?" It's almost teasing the way he says it, Tsuyuko narrows her eyes at him, well now she has to know. Even if a no will break her heart.

"Am I?" She dares and Shikaku just grins ever so softly at her.

"Yes, Tsuyuko, I'm thinking about you." He admits, and the outloud truth stills her to her very core. Oh.

Oh.

"Hmm. I see." She finds her voice, but her brain is not at all saying what she needs it to. Shikaku snorts.

"That's it?" He harps sarcastically, she shoves him.

“Let me process for a minute, okay! I need a moment.” She panics, ever so slightly and if anyone asks later she will one hundred percent deny panicking.

“I’ll give you whatever time you need.” He mutters oh so sincerely and her heart does a very weird summersault in her chest. Holy crap, he’s serious.

“Shikaku I swear... fuck, I cannot believe this is actually happening..” Tsuyuko’s mouth gets the best of her, Shikaku has a forlorn look that parses over his face briefly before he school his expression.

“We don’t have to talk about it anymore, we can just forget this conversation happened.” He says in what is probably the most impressive nonchalant tone considering her reaction. Tsuyuko slaps his arm, harder than she intended, oh no they won’t be doing that.

“Hold up, no, we are not doing that. Sorry, minute over. Shikaku, could you please actually ask me the question, the right way?” She regains her composure and Shikaku rolls his eyes at her, but he does turn so his whole body is facing her and then he smiles so warm and lovingly at her.

“Tsuyuko, will you be my wife?”

“Yes. Yes I will, can we wait a year though before anything official is done?” She hates to have to add, but, considering the war and her work for the Sandaime. When they get married she wants nothing else to worry about. She wants to give that her full attention.

“We can wait until the day before I turn twenty, it’s fine with me, I don’t mind waiting.” Shikaku tells her with such sincerity. Really he’s become quite charming over the last few years.

“You’ve become quite the charmer Nara Shikaku.” She teases, leaning into his space with her own snakeline smile.

“Some might say a snake charmer.” He boops her nose, Tsuyuko grins.

“Haha, so funny. Come on, let’s get something to eat. I’m starving.” She jumps up from the bench, grabbing his arm and pulling him up with her.

“Whatever you want is fine with me.” Shikaku allows her to manhandle him back to the main road and they continue on walking. None of the street food appeals to her, in fact she has no desire to

stand and eat.

“Can we sit down somewhere, I can only handle so much quick food.”

“Sure, there is a barbecue place open around here somewhere.”

“Sounds perfect.”

Dinner is served with sake that Shikaku gets for them as their own little celebration, and really who is she to deny her now future husband this.

Later, if someone were to ask him what happened after he left with Tsuyuko, Shikaku would lie straight to their face. What happened isn't any of their business. Most of it isn't that is. He does inform his parents that he has in fact found a wife, but they are going to wait to make it official. His parents are as expected nonplussed by this, and excited when he tells them who. Shikaku endures their congratulations before he slinks off to his room to sleep.

He had not expected in any way his night to go the way it did. When he offered to walk Tsuyuko home, he didn't think that's what they would talk about. Of course in hindsight he probably should have prepared for something like that, he knew better than most how curious she was. It was one of the many things he loved about her.

Shikaku sinks into his bed, face first, he can still feel the phantom sensation of her lips on his. The feel of more than that as it followed, he presses his face further into his pillow than before as his face heats up. Last night had not turned out at all as he expected it to. He can't believe they... actually he can but that is really not the point.

He lets sleep claim him sometime after, his mind focused solely on the woman whom he loved.

Chapter End Notes

(“ ˘ ˇ”)

...so when i said slow burn... i lied lol :)

A day in the life..

Tsuyuko has the best sleep after her evening with Shikaku. It's mid morning when she gets up, having no obligations today as she was told she was once again not allowed at the hospital for at least a day 'take your rest days to actually rest child' she can hear both her dad's and Tsunade's voice overlapping in her head, so rude- she enjoys her work at the hospital. And look, maybe since she benched Nawaki almost four months ago now she's been there more, but it doesn't mean she's over doing it. She's a doctor for crying out loud! Tsuyuko huffs as she throws herself off the bed and walks over to the small vanity she had in her room to examine her well rested appearance.

Ah so that's what she looks like without dark circles, how nice. She quickly grabs the spray bottle of water to attempt to tame her hair, it's mostly a lost cause at this point... maybe she should get a haircut. If it weren't as long it might be easier to manage.

A soft knock on her bedroom door pulls her attention away from that train of thought. Orochimaru opens the door slowly.

"You were out late." He makes note of instantly, Tsuyuko sets her spray bottle down and looks at him.

"I was with Shikaku. Is that a problem?" She doesn't quite snap but it's a near thing, she blinks at her own tone ignoring the raised brow she gets from the sannin. Orochimaru shakes his head.

"No, it's not. You usually don't stay out late, I was simply curious." He explains, tone nearly bored. Tsuyuko rubs the back of her neck sheepishly, apparently another life's expectations were peaking through a bit too much just then.

"Ah, yea, sorry, that was more defensive than necessary." She apologizes, owning up to her tone, Orochimaru hums he simply nods to agree with her.

"It was. But I'll let it go. Did something happen?" His tone shifts to barely concealed concern, Tsuyuko shakes her head turning back to set the spray bottle down. She'd be better off showering and starting over with her hair than trying to tame it.

"Do you really want to know the answer to that chichi?" She grins innocently at him, turning to consider her room, oh it's a mess in here

how awful, she'll need to pick up before doing anything else. Orochimaru seems to contemplate his life choices for a moment as he pinches the bridge of his nose. Tsuyuko pays him no mind, he can have his midlife crises in peace as far as she is concerned.

Now.. where is her hair tie?

"I trust that whatever you are getting up to with a boy, you are smart about it and I do not require any details beyond that you are safe and everything is as it should be." He intones blandly after a moment, Tsuyuko gives a quick thumbs up over her shoulder before stooping down to pick up yarn that must have gotten knocked out of the bin when she came in last night.

"Mmkay, and yes everything is fine and as it should be." She gives a verbal affirmation when it appears her thumbs up is not good enough, Tsuyuko turns to face her dad. He seems uncaring of the chaos before him and nods, completely used to her antics.

"Good. And Tsuyuko, before you come into the kitchen if you don't want to deal with Jiraiya's multitude of questions you have a mark on your collarbone." Orochimaru remarks dryly while pointing at her, Tsuyuko follows his gaze and finds said mark. She regards it for a moment before glancing back up at her dad.

She's so glad that shinobi give almost no fucks about these kind of things or else this would be very awkward for the both of them. Instead she nods easily. "Thanks."

"No problem. Beyond that, is there anything else I should know?" He asks with a knowing tone. Tsuyuko stops what she's doing to pin him with a flat look, what is this 20 questions? She is trying to not look like a heathen, can they do this later?

"It sounds like you already have a suspicion about it." She points out blandly. Her dad pins her with his own unimpressed look.

"I'd like to hear it from you." He tells her pointedly.

"Shikaku asked me to be his wife, I agreed - with the condition that we would wait until I am at least sixteen to make it official." She informs him point blank, no point to skirt around it, there was probably a proper way to go about it but frankly she doesn't give a shit.

"I suppose I will allow it. I find those terms acceptable for my

daughter.” He tries to remain impassive, but she can see a hint of a smile just at the edge of his lips. Tsuyuko beams at him, smiling brightly.

“Thank you chichi.”

“Hush, finish getting ready, you will be coming to the lab with me today.” Orochimaru half scowls at her, not with any real malice and he rolls his eyes, huffing his response quickly.

“Tsunade-shishou banned me from the hospital today.” Tsuyuko points out while grabbing a pile of clothes she neglected to fold off the chair next to her bed to try and find something to wear today.

Sometimes she missed being on the fronts because at least then she could just wear the standard jounin uniform and no one would bat an eye. But inside the village as a kunoichi she was expected to dress the part and it really wasn’t fair. She holds up a shirt to inspect it and huffs when she remembers it shrunk and was now tight in weird places.

“I am aware, I have a meeting that I must attend but a project that needs attention. Are you up for the challenge?” Orochimaru drolls from her doorway, watching the entire thing with a bemused expression on his face. Tsuyuko perks up at that, it’s been a while since she’s been able to work with her dad in the lab.

These days they typically worked around one another, but not together, or in passing and it was really starting to be depressing. She enjoyed working with him.

“Always. Alright now go away so I can be mad at my clothes in peace.” She gestures at the pile on her bed with a distasteful glare.

“Do I ask why you are mad at your clothes?” He doesn’t really seem like he wants to, Tsuyuko just shrugs.

“I hate them, it’s fine. The seams have been very rude lately.” She grumbles, tossing one shirt into the small trash can she kept in her room. It was well worn and stained, it had to go.

“Noted. I’ll make an appointment for you to go get refitted for your gear, sounds like you’ve grown again.”

“Nooo, how awful.” She whines playfully, that actually didn’t sound like a bad idea, besides it wouldn’t hurt considering she has another

rotation coming up in the next month or so.

“So help me child, get dressed, breakfast will be ready soon.”

“Hai, hai.” She waves him off, most disinterested, distracted by the task at hand. Tsuyuko completely misses Orochimaru shaking his head at her as she turns and stalks over to her dresser.

But such is life.

Tsuyuko remains busy at the lab until late evening, Orochimaru is in and out of the building for most of the day. She wonders how he will manage this when he is officially the Hokage once the war ends. Will her dad just be able to let go of his research? Well she supposed they'd cross that bridge eventually. It takes a few moments to wrap up the experiment she'd been observing but after that she closes the lab for the evening, engaging seals and traps to protect their work.

She makes the trek up the stairs back to the main entrance and finds Shikaku in the lobby. Tsuyuko does not bother to fight the giggle expression that takes over her features when seeing him here.

“What are you doing here?” She asks while walking over and wrapping her arms through his. Shikaku smiles at her, so soft and tender, it's almost too much for her to handle.

To think they'd been in the same wavelength for so long but neither realized their orbits were aligned. Maybe, she actually doesn't know that much about astronomy.

“I finished evening training earlier, wanted to see you.” He tells her easily, Tsuyuko smiles, that was sweet.

“Aww, Shikaku. Well I'm done here, have you been waiting long?” She lets go just to change out of her lab shoes and put her normal shinobi sandals back on.

“Nah, I just got here.” He lets her go, watching with an amused look as she flits about the reception area. Tsuyuko puts her lab shoes in their proper place and marks the time stamp so there is a record of her leaving.

“Ahh good. Glad you didn't have to wait long.”

“It wouldn’t have mattered if I had too.” He mutters, and oh my goodness does he realize how much this affects her? Probably not.

“Stop, you’re so charming it’s killing me.” Tsuyuko fakes swooning and smirks at him. Shikaku just rolls his eyes at her.

“Yea sure. Want me to walk you home? I know you don’t like being out at night.” He offers, and oh her heart does another funny thing because she never told him she didn’t like being out alone at night. So the fact that he’d notice her aversion to it over the years was just nice.

Of course he probably thinks it’s because of a completely different reason... She’ll need to tell him about ROOT at some point, probably, about her memories too... Not tonight, she’s not dealing with that tonight she decides looking at his soft sincere and unbothered expression. No point in ruining a nice evening with all of that. She’ll wait until they were out of the village again to tell him, until Shimura was dealt with she still believed that was the safest place. Far, far away from his evil clutches.

“Yea, that would be nice.” She settles on, smiling gently, taking Shikaku’s hand when he offers it. His hand is warmer than her, but she doesn’t mind, if anything she squeezes it a little tighter on her own.

As if to reassure herself that it was really him, that he was really here. That this isn’t a dream she is going to wake up from and be horribly disappointed it was reality.

“You okay?” He asks softly when she hasn’t made any move to leave the building yet. Tsuyuko nods, she squeezes his hand one more time.

“Yea, I’m good. Just making sure this is real.” She admits, leading them out of the lab and locking the door behind them. It’s a little difficult with one hand but she manages.

“It’s real, I’m here, I’m not going anywhere.”

“Promise?” Tsuyuko hates how meek she sounds, hates how her abandonment issues choose now of all times to rear their ugly head, but Shikaku takes it in stride. He smiles softly, before leaning down to press his nose into the top of her head.

“I promise. Now, let’s get you home.” He shifts, kissing her temple before straightening. Tsuyuko giggles ever so slightly and leans into his side.

“I love you.” She whispers.

“I love you too.” He returns without hesitation.

She won't lie, those three little words mean the absolute world to her. They're like music to her ears and a balm to her soul. To be loved so sweetly is a marvelous thing. A truly wonderful sensation. Tsuyuko stays tucked into Shikaku's side the entire walk back to her home.

Of course they are still at war and it is only a few weeks later that she and several others from her generation get their next round of deployment stations. Minato and her are set to terrorize another Iwa front, but this time, they aren't going just the two of them. Oh no, this time Orochimaru is actually coming with them. She's so excited by the prospect that she cannot sit still. Apparently some people weren't pleased that the sannin had sat almost the entirety of the war so far out, and her dad was looking for any excuse to get out of the village for a while.

Whatever the reason is, she doesn't give a crap. She's just excited to be working with him again. It's going to be great, Iwa doesn't stand a chance. Maybe it will convince them to surrender and go home for good.

Doubtful, but she could dream.

“Tsuyuko.” Orochimaru's cuts through, reminding her to take a breath and sit down. Tsuyuko nods, sitting at the table.

“Now, there is one more matter.” Orochimaru says, pulling a scroll from his haori.

“What?” She raises her brow, watching him fiddle with the scroll until it opens.

“Happy birthday.” Orochimaru pulls a small box out of the storage scroll and hands it to her. Tsuyuko blinks slowly at him, her birthday is still a few weeks off. Oh it would be while they're deployed, she gets it, she takes the box from her master.

She opens the box to find a pair of earrings that share a similar theme to the ones he wears. Tsuyuko looks up, blinking back tears. “Thank you, chichi.”

“Just put them on Tsuyuko.”

“Hai!”

The price of war..

Chapter Notes

TW: pregnancy loss/still birth

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Life on the frontlines, is well life on the front lines. Tsuyuko loathes the entirety of it. It doesn't help that she keeps being shoved into the med tent as if it's the only thing people think she can do. She's a prolific poison master! She is good for large scale assaults, the fact that she keeps being viewed as just a medic is so insulting to her skills. Her sensei spares her not a second glance as she complains about it for probably the tenth time since they arrived a few weeks ago. He's already given her his opinion on the matter and had nothing to add.

"You can accompany me and Minato today, there has been word of a group close to the valley. Will that sate your desire for chaos?" Orochimaru tells her when it is apparent that she is done complaining for now. Tsuyuko beams at her sensei.

"Yes! Thank you sensei."

"Go prepare your field kit Tsuyuko." He shoos her away, Tsuyuko nods quickly doing as she was instructed.

"Hai!"

..

True to what reports had said there was in fact a group of Iwa shinobi starting to take up residence in the valley. Unlike what the reports had said, there are far more than reported, but even still it should be no problem for the three of them. Orochimaru scowls as he steps away from the vantage point, he makes a clone and tells it to report to camp then he turns to her and Minato.

"How much damage do you think the two of you can cause before I step in to remind them why we don't start wars." There is a glint to her sensei's eyes that is just not nice, a reminder that a beast still lives underneath the surface just waiting to come forth. Tsuyuko grins all teeth, this would be fun.

"Hmm, a good bit. Mi, what do you think?"

“Formation rattlesnake?” He suggests, rubbing his jaw in contemplation. Tsuyuko grins, that sounds like an excellent idea. Orochimaru rolls his eyes at them before nodding.

“Do whatever, just give them the worst time. Tsuyuko, leave Manda for me.” She gives him a quick thumbs up before stepping over to Minato so they can get to work.

Minato places his hand on her shoulder and off they go.



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Tsuyuko, for as good as she is, as skilled and practiced, she is not infallible. She still gets hit, still gets hurt. She is subject to injury, and pain just like the rest of her fellows. The only difference is that most of the time the only proof she took a hit is in the moment by however few take witness to it. She heals herself and keeps moving forward. But when fatigue is high, and they've been fighting for a while, even the most skilled shinobi make mistakes.

...she's never been kicked this hard before. Her body makes an impact with something before she is falling and rolling into recovery pose. Tsuyuko immediately presses her hand into her stomach to access the damage, as she coughs up blood, oh that wasn't great news. The feeling of being displaced takes over as she is moved from the ground in an instance, finding herself back next to Orochimaru. Tsuyuko remains dubbed over, hand still clutching her stomach, eyes blown wide.

Orochimaru takes one look at his apprentice, at his daughter's injured form and it's over for their enemy. In the next instance he is standing on Manda's giant head, Tsuyuko still in shock, it must have been one hell of an impact. He makes a mental note to check her over when they are done here. Minato flickers into existence next to him thanks to a hiraishin seal that had been inked into his own flack jacket, but not before he bends down and pats Manda's head like a dog.

He has no idea why his giant bastard of a summons likes his and Jiraiya's apprentices as much as he did, but he won't try to dispute it either. In times like these, it made keeping an eye on the two a lot easier.

"Manda, wipe them all out." He commands once his summons stops griping at him for being summoned. He thinks it helps that Minato takes position holding Tsuyuko steady and tells the giant beast that his favorite hatchling is injured.

'Withhhh pleasure.'

Tsuyuko is oddly silent when they return to camp, she claimed to have healed herself and stalked off to their tent before Orochimaru could access her condition. As he is almost immediately caught up with the other camp leaders to discuss the battle. He catches Inuzuka Tsume by

the back of her shirt before entering the command tent.

“Oi, what was that for?!” The Inuzuka girl yelps, her canine partner looks at him ready to defend, Orochimaru rolls his eyes at the beast.

“Go to my tent and check on Tsuyuko.” He orders pinning her with a look that leaves no room for objection. The Inuzuka girl huffs at him.

“Yea sure. Come on Kuromaru, let's go check on Tsuyuko.” ‘woof!’ But they stalk away without objection heading towards the area where his tent is.

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Tsuyuko stumbles back to their tent, how could she have been so unaware of her own body. She stumbles from the pain ripping through her abdomen, she barely manages to catch herself on the small table they had set up to eat at, that was currently housing all their extra gear. This is not good. She pushes herself up, forcing herself over to her bedroll, maybe she should have..

No, there's no time for that right now.

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Tsume, while not appreciative of being manhandled by a sannin in the slightest, isn't stupid and does as he told her too. It doesn't take her and Kuromaru long to reach the sannin's tent, but when she arrives the scent of blood is overwhelming, she doesn't hesitate to throw the tent flap open.

There is blood everywhere, what kind of injury...

“Kuromaru go get Orochimaru-sama now!” She sends her partner out and she walks further in. Tsuyuko doesn't seem to register her, but considering what she's looking at, she won't hold it against her friend.

“Tsuyuko, it's Tsume..” She approaches cautiously, kneeling next to her slowly.

“I got kicked in the stomach.. I didn't realize...” Tsuyuko mumbles half coherently, Tsume reaches out to press her hand into the girl's forehead.

“No you wouldn't have been here if you'd known. It's going to be okay..” As soon as Orochimaru got here that is. Tsume isn't a medic,

she has the bare minimal training, she is not equipped to deal with something like this.

“Yea...”

“Hey, stay with me. Kuromaru went to get Orochimaru-sama.” Tsume says gently, not entirely sure what she should do. The tent flap flies open before Tsuyuko can respond, Orochimaru steps in commanding Kuromaru to wait outside before he makes a b-line to them. His face contorts in a way that can only be described as worried.

“Oh you stupid girl, you should have said something.” He mumbles under his breath, grabbing the med pack off the table and joining them. Tsume wants to yell at him, because that's not at all what he should be saying now to her friend, but Tsuyko grabs her hand before nodding.

“I didn't think it would be like this.” She manages after a moment, voice full of indescribable pain. Orochimaru just nods, an impassive expression taking over, Tsume sees a switch- he's clinical not familiar and Tsume realizes that this is a defense tactic.

One she's seen a few times from Tsuyuko herself. “What do you need me to do Orochimaru-sama?”

“Sit behind her and support her, this won't take long.”

“Hai.” Tsume adjusts her position so Tsuyuko is leaning into her. She gently presses her face into the back of her friend's wild hair.

“It's going to be okay, just lean into me I got you.”

“Thanks Tsume.”

Orochimaru is beside himself with rage, he should have followed Tsuyuko to the tent, he should have made sure she was actually fine before anything else. He lets his rage simmer under the surface while he cares for his daughter, first getting the hemorrhage under control, it would be all in vain if she died from blood loss. Upon examination there is nothing he can do for the fetus, it probably died upon impact, the only thing he can do now is deliver it so it doesn't cause Tsuyuko to go into septic shock.

He works silently to get the blood loss under control, using iryo-

ninjutsu scalpels to cut into her abdomen to remove the baby. It doesn't make a single sound, he hadn't expected it to, based on the size it's not... it wouldn't have been viable anyway. He scowls to himself, what a terrible thing to have happened. Gently he sets it aside, so he can focus on healing his student. Orochimaru commands Tsume to get a blood pill from the medkit, and then he gets back to work, making sure to remove the placenta- abruption... She's lucky to be alive.

The price of war.

He wished something like this was an isolated incident, but the truth was, no matter how hard they tried to make sure their kunoichi were benched when they became pregnant it wasn't an infallible system. Especially in young kunoichi like Tsuyuko, ones who'd been subject to birth control from a very young age, whose bodies were so out of sync that it would be easy to miss the signs. Kunoichi didn't have normal menstrual cycles like civilian women, they often didn't show any physical signs of pregnancy until the late stages, training like they did would also impact how pregnancy impacted their physical form. Not to mention that they are at war, lack of nutrition, stress, sleeplessness, constant threat... he does not hold it against her for missing this. Orochimaru didn't hold it against any kunoichi who missed it.

The system should be better than it was to protect them, the only thing that this was is a failing on their part.

He just wished she hadn't had to suffer like this. To pay this price. "Sensei.. Let me.." Tsuyuko speaks for the first time, soundly worse than he liked.

"I don't think that's wise Tsuyuko." He speaks softly, he can't imagine that it will do anything good.

"Please.. Chichi, please, let me hold my baby." She whispers, eyes filled with tears. He sighs at her, taking a cloth from the medkit to wrap the still born in it. Carefully he places the bundle in her arms.

Tsuyuko holds the bundle close to her chest and cries. Orochimaru finds he cannot bear to watch and gets to work cleaning up the aftermath. There is no reason for anyone else to see this. He keeps his ear trained on his daughter but otherwise lets her have her moment, Tsume is quietly comforting her, he can see the other girl gently stroking Tsuyuko's hair every so often.

Eventually Tsuyuko cries until she falls asleep, and only then does he

seal the baby to be buried at home. Orochimaru eyes the Inuzuka girl. She glances at him, nodding slowly.

“I’ll stay with her, they’ll start to wonder what’s taking so long soon.” She mumbles, glaring at the entrance.

“When she wakes up, make her take another blood replenishment pill, and try to get her to eat.” He orders, finding it easier to deal out the next bit of instruction than to actually deal with how this is affecting himself. His feelings over the matter are not important, the only thing that matters is making sure Tsuyuko will recover.

“Sure.” Tsume intones almost flippantly, but he can tell by the look in her eyes that she’s not going anywhere. Pack creatures. Orochimaru opens the tent flap to find Kuromaru still standing guard.

Well at least he listened.

“Good. I’ll be back in a bit, Kuromaru you may come in now, thank you for standing guard.” He praises before slipping out and heading back to the command tent.

Orochimaru pushes down the bile in his throat, this ends now. It has too. He will not watch his student suffer anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Hi, so quick check it! I debated for a very long time if I was going to include this detail - and after a long consideration it became apparent that its one that had to be included, I couldn't work around it. I tried to be as delicate with the situation as I possibly could and I do apologize if the topic has upset anyone. At this point in time Tsuyuko is 15. Which is why I never wrote the scenes that created this moment.

Going forward things are going to start moving very fast, and I hope yall stick around to find out how Tsuyuko grieves this loss and what becomes of one slimy warhawk

Thanks for reading!

No time to fall apart now..

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The problem with war is that it's not so easily ended, and even in the face of inconceivable loss, destruction rampages on. War will take, and take, and take until there is nothing left. That is the fundamental truth of war.

Tsuyuko understands this truth better than most. The third war has taken so much from her and she can't even mourn her losses properly because there is still work to be done. Still lives to save, shinobi to be healed. Enemies to poison and destroy. There is no time for mourning during war.

No time to process.

It's not that she ignores what happened, no, how can she when every time she closes her eyes the only thing she can see is... she tries to will the memory away. Maybe Orochimaru had been right, maybe she shouldn't have...

"Incoming! We have a three man team with severe injuries." One of the other medics called out. Tsuyuko jumps up as the tent flap flies open and...

She had wondered if Shikaku would end up with his trademark scars... looks like she got her answer.

"Shikaku!" She yells, rushing to him. His face is covered in blood, one eye swollen shut. Inoichi, who seems to be carrying the brunt of his weight, appears scratched but otherwise intact. Then there was Choza, he looked thin- not critically so but she barking out orders for someone to help her and get him some too much on for crying out loud!

"What happened?" She demands as she leads Shikaku to a bed to sit so she can work more efficiently. She still hasn't told him what happened, what they lost, team Hatake was not here when it occurred they arrived later.

She wasn't sure that she even could tell him without breaking. There was too much to be done still for her to fall apart, she could later, but

now... she has to focus on those still alive.

“Shit hit the fan.” Inoichi bites like it should be obvious, she keeps her hand steady on Shikaku’s face to heal his mangled flesh the best she can. It will still scar, the wounds are deep, but it should fade better over time than it had originally.

“Obviously. But I need to know what exactly happened so I know how to treat you all, jackass.” She bites back just as hard as he had. Inoichi seems to come into his senses and nods.

“Sorry.” He mumbles.

“Yea, whatever, report now.” She all but growls, Shikaku grabs her hand.

“I’m okay, don’t bite Inoichi’s head off. Inoichi go check on Choza.” Shikaku takes command of his team. If the situation was different she’d find that very attractive, right now though she doesn’t have that in her.

“Yea, okay.” Inoichi mumbles, he stalks off to join Choza at the other end of their makeshift trauma bay.

“Shikaku..” Tsuyuko whispers, trying to keep her concern at bay. Shikaku smiles ever so reassuringly at her, letting go of her hand so she can work.

“I’m fine, it’s just a scratch.” He mutters dryly. Tsuyuko raises her brow. She wished shinobi would evaluate their take on what ‘just a scratch’ meant. Because this was not that.

“It’s a gaping wound in your face but go off I guess.” She mutters sarcastically.

“It will heal.” He waves off her comment as she works on cleaning the wound now that it’s been healed to some extent with iryo-ninjutsu.

“You’re gonna have scars.” She informs him blandly. Shikaku just shrugs looking completely unphased.

“Scars are cool.” He smirks at her. Tsuyuko pins him with an unimpressed look. She wonders if he will be this composed when she tells him about the baby.

No... she can’t think about that right now. She has to focus on the

here and now. Tsuyuko sighs to clear her mind.

“If you say so. Are you sure you’re alright?” She can’t help but to fret. His grin shifts to something softer.

“Promise. Will you go check on Choza now?” Shikaku grabs her hand again giving It a reassuring squeeze, Tsuyuko squeezes back before nodding.

“Of course. Itoka, finish up here!” Tsuyuko nods, calling out to the next closest medic to take over. He needed some easy dressings and maybe a few butterfly bandages but would otherwise be fine.

“Hai Yasha-sensei!”

Tsuyuko walks over to where the other medics are tending to Choza. She steps in quietly to start checks and figure out if there is anything not obviously wrong with him. No signs of internal bleeding and no obvious external wounds. It appears to be a case of chakra exhaustion and overuse of his clan technique, not to the point of hospitalization thankfully.

“Yasha-sensei? Thoughts?” She isn’t sure which of the two medics ask, it doesn’t matter who it is, she answers the question all the same.

“He’ll live to see another day. Let’s get him started on some high calorie supplements and do a round of general healing to address the chakra exhaustion. I’d advise at least two days of rest to recuperate your stores Choza.” She tells her friend pointedly, Choza offers her a thumbs up and a charming smile.

“Thanks Tsu.” He grins boldly. Tsuyuko offers him a quick smile before considering her third favorite blond to his left. Inoichi is squinting, hands pressed into his forehead.

She tsk. What a fucking moron.

“No problem. Also someone please get Inoichi something to take for his migraine.” She monotones the last part hoping he gets the idea that she is in fact not thrilled with him.

“How did you...” he starts but cuts himself off from pain. Tsuyuko scoffs at him.

“You’re an idiot. Can’t fix that though.” She takes the pills from the other medic to hand to Inoichi. He all but snatches it from her and

swallows it dry, disgusting.

“Nice to see your bedside manner is still shit.” He grumbles, Tsuyuko rolls her eyes before turning to walk back over to Shikaku to give him her diagnosis of his teammates.

“You’re welcome.” She calls over so flippantly over her shoulder.

Tsuyuko avoids her tent like the plague itself. It’s easy when the med tent has beds set up for the medics, to just not leave when her shift ends. Of course her aversion to the tent does not go unnoticed. Orochimaru sighs when he finds his daughter asleep at her work bench.

He cannot leave yet. Iwa is putting up a larger fight than he expected. But... it is apparent that she cannot stay. As a medic he could send her home before their rotation ends, request a swap out- he thinks he might call on Tsunade, she would take Tsuyuko’s place without a second thought. The only problem arises with his daughter.

She will protest. She will not appreciate being benched now. When she is trying so hard not to think about what happened. To avoid the cost of war.

“Tsuyuko.” He gently shakes her shoulder to wake her. Tsuyuko in true fashion wakes immediately but groggy.

“What’s wrong?” She asks through a sleep riddled voice.

“You can’t sleep here.” He tells her simply. Tsuyuko yawns sitting up slowly, she blinks sleepily at him.

“I don’t wanna..” She trails off as someone comes in the far end of the med tent. He nods, he knows what she means.

“I know. But you cannot sleep hunched over like that. You are still healing and I shouldn’t have to tell you to be cautious.” He tries to keep his tone gentle, but she’d had major surgery not long ago, so he is sure it sounds more reprimanding than anything.

“Sahh, I know. Just tired today... Shikaku came back injured.” She keeps her voice quiet leaning back in her chair, still not bothering to move.

“I heard.”

"I'm tired sensei.. I'm so tired." She whispers, glancing away from him. Orochimaru reaches out and lets his hand rest on her head for a moment.

"I know you are. Move to a bed and do not skip breakfast again." His heart aches for her, but he knows she will not appreciate that sentiment right now, so instead he gives orders.

"Hai.." She gets up, slowly moving to the bed behind her station. Orochimaru shakes his head, his mind made up.

He'd send a snake to Tsunade in the morning. She would not appreciate being summoned at this hour.

Tsuyuko wants to protest the order. To be mad, to pitch a fit and fight it... but she is just so tired. She has nothing left to give. She can feel the weight of all the tolls she's paid to this war so far.

"I understand." She intones without any true inflection. She feels empty.

So very empty.

"Good. Tsunade will arrive in the next day or so then you will be sent home." Orochimaru tells her easily, accepting her lack of fight without question.

"Hai. Is that all sensei?" She asks softly, glancing down at the ground not wanting to look at him. Tsuyuko cannot deal with his pity... no not pity, he wouldn't pity her. But she cannot handle his obvious concern at the moment.

"For now. Go and rest, Tsuyuko." He commands. Tsuyuko nods quickly before ducking out of the command tent. She avoids her tent, but doesn't go to the medical tent either, instead she seals out Tsume.

Her fellow kunoichi and friend should have just gotten back from patrol and would be off duty for a bit... Shikaku was out on patrol and she still hadn't told him what happened. She'll wait until he's back in the village too.

It would be better that way.

Tsume takes one look at her and pats the empty bedroll next to her.

"You look like shit." The Inuzuka girl barks, it gets a sliver of a smile

from Tsuyuko.

“Feel like it too. I’m being benched.” She admits as she sits in the empty bedroll. Tsume, like her, was down teammates, so it was just her and Kuromaru in her tent. Not that Tsuyuko would complain. No need to come up with excuses when it was just the two of them.

“Good. You deserve a break. Lay down.” Tsume orders with a grin, Tsuyuko manages to roll her eyes at her friend.

“In a minute. Are you injured?”

“Nah, I’m good. Rest, I’m gonna. Kuromaru will keep up safe.” The nikkun woofs an affirmation at his master’s declaration. Tsuyuko wonders when he’ll be able to talk, he did that right?

Honestly she can’t remember anymore.

“Mm’Kay.” She mumbles, laying down next to Tsume. Tsuyuko doesn’t sleep. She’s not that kind of tired. Tsume on the other hand is out almost instantly, being awake all night would do that to a person she supposed.

Not that she understands that notion.

But she’s not one to defy orders so she rests. At least for now. She wanted to check in on team Hatake at some point today, and she probably should see Minato before she goes back to the village without him.

She’ll make that one tomorrow’s problem. For now she leans back and rests. Kuromaru settles up in the small space between them but rest his large head on her chest, his tail draped over Tsume’s leg. Tsuyuko absentmindedly lets her hands run through his fur. Kugo’s partner Nala and Kuromaru must have been from the same litter she notes at that moment. They had similar builds and fur type. Or they at least shared parents.

“You’re a good boy. Thank you for looking out for us.” Tsuyuko keeps her voice quiet to not disturb Tsume. Kuromaru regards her form under half opened eyes, he nudges his snout into her sternum.

He might not be able to talk just yet, but she understood that meant thank you well enough. She continues to absentmindedly pet the nikkun until she ends up drifting off into restless sleep.

No words to give..

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tsuyuko arrived back with little fanfare, with a small team who were either too injured to return to combat or those who had to return due to familial reasons. She signs herself back in and heads on her way, Tsuyuko debates going to the Hokage resident to see Biwako-sama, to just be around another person who might understand her grief... but she finds she still can't stomach the idea of talking about what happened.

At home, she is greeted by silence, by darkness. No one is there, which is to be expected. Jiraiya was the only one not stationed, but it seemed he was on another mission now. She carefully takes her shoes off before trekking into her home. Despite the fact she hasn't eaten since early morning she finds she's not hungry and heads straight to her room.

She should shower and bathe, but Tsuyuko can't muster the motivation for those tasks either. Instead she falls face first onto her bed, before curling in on herself and letting her mind drift. Sleep evades her, but she doesn't move from the spot.

Sarutobi Biwako frowns when her husband relays his student's message to him about his own apprentice while she prepares lunch for her youngest's school day. It's been a while since she had laid eyes on her fellow reincarnate. Someone else like her, someone reborn with memories, someone who also reminded her of another life. A granddaughter she had raised and loved ever so dearly. Biwako maintains her frowns when Hiruzen gets to the part about why Orochimaru deemed it necessary to bench one of their best medics.

Her heart aches for the young girl. To be so young and to have to suffer through something so horrible.

"Biwako... would you?" Hiruzen starts easily, his eyes soft, she nods. She understands what he's asking of her without outright saying it.

"I will go check on her today. She got back when?" Biwako questions as she closes off the bento for her youngest. She'll need to go wake him soon.

“Yesterday, from the gate report.” He tells her, Biwako hums. She’s been alone in that giant house since sometime yesterday... that would not do.

“May I borrow Inari today?” She asks, glancing to the corner of the room where her husband’s favored guard tended to reside. Hiruzen hums, following her gaze.

“Of course... but Biwako, you know..” He begins, she just nods. She knows, that’s why she’s asked.

“I know, but it will have to do. Inari won’t blab her daughter’s secrets, you know this.” She chides as she moves about their kitchen. Biwako sets the kettle on the stove top to boil water before grabbing two cups for tea.

“I know, I know. You are of course right.” Hiruzen sighs. Biwako glances over her shoulder to smile ever so pointedly at him.

“And don’t you ever forget it, Hiruzen.” He laughs as the kettle hisses. Perfect timing.

“No, of course not.” He mutters, Biwako sets his cup in front of him before fixing her own. Hiruzen downs his tea quickly, he must have another busy day ahead of him.

“I must be off, without Orochimaru to help me I am unfortunately very busy.” He stands from the table, clearing his spot, and heading towards the door to leave the room in one fell movement.

“Go, don’t keep anyone waiting.” She takes a slow sip from her teacup. Hiruzen chuckles, stopping in the doorway to look back at her.

“Ha! We will see. Let Tsuyuko know that I’m ordering at least two weeks of rest, Dan can handle the hospital while Tsunade is away and I don’t want her in the lab in light of this...”

“I will. Now go.” Hiruzen nods before heading out. Biwako finishes her tea before leaving the table to go get her boys up and ready for the day.

She needs to get up, to move, to bathe and change out of her dirty clothes. She needs to get up. Tsuyuko doesn’t move. She doesn’t have the will to. She never expected to feel like this.

Empty.

Light filters in through the window signifying morning, Tsuyuko blinks back tears. She's so tired, so done in. The tolls of war have really taken all they can from her. She doesn't know how long she lays there, unmoving, unfeeling, alone.

It must be nearly noon when the tell-tale sign of someone entering the house is heard. It's intentionally loud, to not alarm anyone home. Tsuyuko doesn't move, it's probably just Jiraiya. He must be home now. She manages to roll over to watch the door just in case.

A few moments later the door opens and... it's Biwako-sama. Tsuyuko blinks slowly at her, what is she doing here?

"Oh my dear. Let's get the window open." The older woman bustles into her room without invitation. Not that Tsuyuko was in the state to protest.

"Biwako-sama... why are you?"

"Hiruzen asked me to come check on you, you know how he is. Your stupid master, sending you home to a house alone, how irresponsible.." The woman grumbles as she walks over to the window and pushes it up to air out the room. Tsuyuko forces herself to sit up, she grabs a pillow to hold onto, something to ground her.

"He just did what he thought was best." She protests Orochimaru being called stupid, Biwako shakes her head.

"Perhaps not stupid, but not completely understanding. Come on, let's get you in the tub, your hair has started to mat Tsuyuko." Biwako walks over to the bed, she carefully wraps her arms around Tsuyuko to help her stand.

"I should have showered when I got home... I just.." She trails off not wanting to finish the excuse. How pathetic, she just didn't feel like she could. Biwako smiles sadly and gently pats her back.

"You don't have to explain yourself to me dear. I understand. Come, let's get you cleaned up."

"Thank you." Tsuyuko manages after a moment, slipping back into coherency, remembering her manners. Biwako hums helping her down to the bathroom.

Tsuyuko stands in the doorway while the older kunoichi starts the tub. "I should shower first.." She begins, but Biwako shakes her head.

"A bath, we can always drain and run fresh water." Biwako leaves no argument so Tsuyuko just nods her head.

..

Biwako carefully pours a basin of water over Tsuyuko's head. The girl is eerily quiet but allows her to care for her, so she will count it as a win for now. Once she is satisfied that everything has been properly rinsed out of Tsuyuko's hair, she reaches out to drain the tub before getting up to grab a towel. As a kunoichi midwife she has cared for far too many kunoichi like this, those that have suffering incomprehensible loss, loss she has experienced herself.

There are no words that will aptly describe the way it feels to bear this type of pain. No words that offer solace, this was something that she would simply have to reason with herself, but Biwako would not allow her to be alone through the brunt of it. There was no reason to make her be alone. Even if there was nothing she could say that would sate the young kunoichi's pain, she could at least be here for her.

Biwako exits the bathroom to quickly grab the towel she'd thrown into the dryer beforehand. She returns to find Tsuyuko still sitting in the mostly drained tub staring absently as the water drains out.

"Up you get, you'll catch a cold just sitting here." She helps her stand, quickly wrapping the warm towel around her already shivering form. Biwako frowns, this girl is far too thin. Well she will add making a meal to her list. Jiraiya was here not long ago, the kitchen should still be stocked.

Tsuyuko is in an out of coherency the entire time it takes to get her into something comfortable, Biwako takes it in stride. Sometimes, Tsuyuko reminds her far too much of someone she had loved and lost. The resemblance to her granddaughter in temperament is strong. But for now she will keep that observation to herself.

"Now that you are dressed, I think you should try to eat something. Let's go see what's in the kitchen."

"Yes ma'am." Tsuyuko mumbles, Biwako sighs but steers her along.

..

Tsuyuko feels like she is having an out of body experience. She sits numbly at the kitchen counter while Biwako-sama flits about the kitchen with a grace that can only be described as elegant. There is no surprise as to why Hiruzen-sama picked her to be his wife. By all accounts and observations Biwako is an excellent choice, she is stern at times but kind and carries herself with grace and elegance. Biwako-sama was everything that a kage's wife should be.

An ANBU in a snarling fox mask flickers into existence next to her. Tsuyuko, if she were in a better state of mind she would realize that the ANBU is Suyuri-san. But she's not in the mindset to put pieces of puzzles together, so instead she ends up staring blankly at the ANBU as they make rice.

"Thank you Inari. When that is done will you let Nara Shiori know we will be stopping by."

"Of course ma'am." Inari bows her head and then turns her attention back to the rice. The two go back to working in silence, Tsuyuko just watches them. What an interesting pair..

..

After having something to eat, Tsuyuko appears to be more aware than before, good it means they were making some progress. Now the last thing she can do for the girl, make arrangements on her behalf so she isn't alone until Orochimaru or that fiancé of hers returns. The girl's future mother-in-law would suffice.

Tsuyuko would more than likely protest if she ordered Inari to stay with her or for her to go to the Hatake household. The waters between the two were still icy at best. Not that Biwako blames the teen for it, or even blame's Suyuri herself, she can understand both sides. But now was not the time to try and help that relationship mend, it would have to do that on its own time. No, because now they must focus on what is best for Tsuyuko to recover, to process and start to heal.

Enter Nara Shiori. She would be a suitable choice to look after Tsuyuko until her precious people return. Biwako packs a small bag for the teen before steering her into her shoes and out the door.

"Biwako-sama... where are we going?"

"To the Nara compound. I think it's best if you are with others right now, and as much as I would like to stay and help, I do have to return to my sons. They will otherwise set my house on fire if left alone too long." She explains with a light air, Tsuyuko gives her a wide eyed

look.

“I never told...” She trails off glancing away, as if ashamed. Biwako shakes her head. There was no sense in that. On a frontline was not the time or place to discuss something like this with your partner. It deserved to be handled with delicate care.

She does not hold it against Tsuyuko for waiting to tell Shikaku. She knows that Shiori won't either.

“That wasn't the time to. If it would help, I am willing to explain what happened to Shiori for you. It is no trouble for me.” Biwako tells her gently. Tsuyuko glances back at her and nods.

“Thank you.” Tsuyuko whispers, Biwako wraps her arm around her shoulders and pulls her in close like she would have her granddaughter a lifetime ago.

“No problem, now let's get going.”

Chapter End Notes

In which recovery is a process..

A burden shared..

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tsuyuko spends the two weeks of mandated rest at the Nara compound. She does not leave the premises, except to see her brother or to have tea with the Sandaime under the guise of seeing Biwako to say thank you for her help that second day back. She is feeling clearer now, not as empty, but it is still a near thing. It's like she's standing on the edge, and one wrong move will have her falling into the abyss. It is not a feeling she relishes in the slightest. To feel so out of control.

She hadn't even known, to think how much harder this would be had she been aware.. No she's not going to think about that actually.

Tsuyuko ambles around the Nara compound aimlessly, it's still early in the morning, the sun has barely begun to kiss the sky. It looks like it will be a nice day. She keeps close to the main house, not wanting to overstep, it was very kind for her future in-laws to allow her to stay with them while her own house was empty.

Shikaku's mother has always been so kind to her, so warm and welcoming.

"Don't you ever sleep Tsuyuko-chan?" But it's Shikaku's father who helps the most to ground her. He pats the spot next to him on the engawa, he must have just finished training.

Nara Shikao is an old man by shinobi standards, much like the current Hyuga and Uchiha clan heads were, but by no means is he incapable. In fact she would probably say he was still very much capable of fighting in wars, but clan heads were exempt from such things, their heirs not so much. Tsuyuko has fought alongside many clan heirs at this point, she's worked in camps full of them. She considers her future father-in-law before taking a seat next to him.

"No, not really... but I've always been like this." She tells him quietly, so as to not disturb the quiet morning.

"I see. If you need anything to take to help, we have a pretty decent recipe for sleep aid." Shikao intones in a level tone, he glances out to the rising sun in the distance. Tsuyuko finds herself smiling.

“Thank you. I’m alright, used to it now.” She honestly wasn’t sure anything short of a tranquilizer would knock her out at this point, there were downsides to being a poison master.

“Hmm. If you say so. How was your walk?” He changes the subject, Tsuyuko leans back on her hands and contemplates her morning walk around the compound before dawn.

“It was alright, the compound is so quiet in the morning.” Shikao chuckles at her answer.

“Yes, yes, we Nara are creatures of night when the shadows are darkest.” He says with an almost sardonic air. He sounds more amused than anything else.

“I figured as much, Shikaku has always been more lively in the evening.”

“Yes. When he was a baby we used to have the hardest time getting him to sleep.” Her future father-in-law tells her softly. Tsuyuko finds that hard to believe, for as long as she has known Shikaku he’s been someone who could fall asleep at the drop of a hat. An enviable trait truly.

“That’s surprising.”

“It really was, the others.. They were never like that.” Shikao tells her, hesitating slightly at the mention of the children they lost to shinobi life. Tsuyuko wants to reach out and offer comfort, but she’s not sure how it will be received so she adjusts how she’s sitting to let her hands rest in her lap.

“No?” She hesitates, maybe they should change the subject. But Shikao smiles, albeit sadly, but a smile nonetheless and continues talking.

“No, but each child is different so they say.” He says with an almost conspiratorial grin. Tsuyuko lets her hand rest on her stomach.

“I guess that’s fair.” She nods slowly, in lieu of having anything more poignant to say. Shikao reaches over and pats her head.

“I received word that they will be returning soon.” He tells her after a moment, Tsuyuko nods.

“I got a snake from sensei first thing this morning, I guess he knew I’d

be awake. It alluded to much the same.” She admits. Shikao hums.

“How are you feeling now?”

“More grounded than I was originally. It’s been nice to be here, I can’t thank either of you enough for extending this kindness to me.” She looks him straight on, her future father-in-law rolls his eyes, patting her head once more before removing his hand.

“Your thanks aren’t necessary. But the notion is noted. Now let’s go inside, it’s a bit chilly out here. Shiori should be awake so we can make tea.” He grabs the cane to the otherside of him to make the transition to standing easier. Tsuyuko thinks he sustained serious nerve damage during the second war which solidified his retirement or something.

“Alright, Shikao-san, I won’t argue with you.” She stands once he is steady on his feet, walking slightly ahead to get the door. The current head of the Nara clan smiles at her back.

“Smart girl.”

Shikaku is exhausted when he finally treks into his house after being gone for over a month. He loathes long rotations, especially when halfway through them his favorite medic is swapped out. Tsuyuko... had not been herself when they arrived, he has no idea what occurred to create such a hollowed out version of the woman he loves either. Orochimaru had not been forthcoming and perhaps more prickly than usual up until the moment he ordered Tsuyuko home. Then the sannin had returned to his normal level of prickliness for the most part, even if it did seem like he was intentionally avoiding Shikaku’s team.

He had to have missed something big.

“Tadaima.” He calls out as he opens the door, it’s late but not late enough that his parents will be asleep. So he’s not too worried about keeping his volume down. He slips his shoes off, making a mental note to clean them at some point, they looked grosser than normal.

There is an extra pair of shinobi sandals, he notes as he shoves his own shoes against the wall as neatly as he can without having to touch his own shoes. He recognizes those shoes, the same shade of blue-ish purple as Orochimaru’s sandals. Tsuyuko. Shikaku glances up to find Tsuyuko standing in the ganken’s second doorway.

She doesn't look nearly as worn down as the last time he'd seen her weeks ago now. But there is something about the look on her face that sets him slightly on edge.

"Okaeri." She smiles softly and he pushes the unease aside. If there was something going on she'd tell him.

Shikaku doesn't hesitate to step into her space and pull her close. He won't deny being worried, won't deny missing her horribly. Gently he nuzzles his face into the top of her head soft curls tickle his nose and chin but he pays the sensation no mind. She is here, she is okay.

"I missed you." He mumbles into her crown before half pulling away so they can walk.

"I missed you too. Are you hurt? Did your injuries heal okay?" She asks rapid fire, giving him a quick assessing look.

"I'm okay, and they healed fine. Got a cool scar. What are you doing here? Not that I'm not incredibly happy to see you." He answers easily, Tsuyuko shrugs almost bonelessly.

"Jiraiya was gone so the house was empty. Your parents let me stay with them so I wasn't alone." There is something more to that, but he doesn't argue.

"Makes sense. Where are they?" He looks around the living room expecting to see them but the house is mostly quiet.

"Shikao-tousan is out in the back yard beating up your cousin again." She informs him blandly, her face so droll that he can't help but to grin. That sounded about right.

"Ensui?" He does ask for clarification but there wasn't anyone else it would be at this hour.

"I think so?" Tsuyuko hesitates, she probably hadn't asked when dad declared he would be training with one of his cousins. Shikaku glances toward the door that leads to the backyard of their living room and sure enough he sees Ensui's silhouette being thrown around the yard by a should be retired shinobi.

What a dumbass.

"He probably deserves it. And ma?" Shikaku gruffs, feeling no sympathy for his cousin. Better Ensui than him. Tsuyuko points

behind her towards the kitchen where the light is still on. Ah should have known.

“Shiori-kaasan is in the kitchen, we were having tea.” She tells him, smoky softly. Shikaku nods his head.

“Ah cool, I need to go shower, then probably eat something. Will you..” He trails off not wanting to sound too desperate. But also not really wanting her to disappear while he's in the room again. Tsuyuko gives his hand a reassuring squeeze.

“I’ll still be here. I’m staying the night, if you’re okay with that?” She sounds unsure, he rolls his eyes but squeezed her hand back,

“No problem here, I’m going to shower.” He reluctantly lets go of her hand. Tsuyuko nods, she gestures back at the kitchen door

“I’ll be in the kitchen with your mom.” Then she turns on her heel and walks back to the kitchen. Shikaku heads to the hall bathroom to take a quick shower and to change.

No point wasting time. It will be nice to spend his time winding down with Tsuyuko for once.

Tsuyuko does not sleep, even now that Shikaku is back, she can’t close her eyes without seeing her baby’s face. Now that she is clearer, based on just how small the stillborn had been she probably hadn’t been more than 20 weeks gestation. How she’d missed half of a pregnancy will remain a mystery to her, but she knows it’s not uncommon among kunoichi who weren’t actively trying to conceive. A thought that she tries not to think, loss like she’d experienced was not uncommon among her fellow kunoichi. A truly terrible thing. It’s no wonder she can’t sleep.

She lays on her side and watches her future husband sleep, he looks so at ease like this, it brings a small smile to her face. Although the moment is ruined by the reminder that she has to tell him, even if she doesn’t think she can, even if she doesn’t think it will do any good.

It wasn’t fair to her, to either of them really to keep this to herself. It would be easier to move on, to heal if she wasn’t grieving alone. Perhaps it’s selfish, but Biwako and even Shiori had agreed that she should talk to Shikaku about it.

He wasn’t there, she does not hold that against him, she’s glad he

didn't have to see her like that. He shouldn't be forced to remain in the dark either. They were to be married eventually, to be husband and wife, this was the type of burden they're meant to share.

But...

She didn't want to ruin the peaceful look on his face either, she didn't want to be responsible for causing him pain. Even though she was still in turmoil herself. It didn't seem fair.

His hand on her face startles her out of her internal contemplation. Shikaku's eyes are half open, but he appears wide awake, Tsuyuko realizes then that that sun has started to peer through the window.

"Good morning." She whispers in the near dark of the room. Shikaku smiles softly.

"Morning." He leans forward, gross morning breath and all and gently kisses her forehead.

Tsuyuko leans into the touch, relishing the soft moment before sighing. She can't not tell him. She has too. Reluctantly she pulls away from him, sitting up slowly bringing her knees to her chest. Shikaku sits up a second later, reaching out to tug a wild curl.

"Something the matter?" He asks gently. Tsuyuko nods, biting her lip, trying her best to steal her nerves and pull the bandage off.

"I have to tell you something." She replies tentatively, pressing her face further into her knees than necessarily comfortable.

"I'm here, I'm listening, you can always tell me anything." Shikaku's hand shifts to rub her back, it takes a moment but she leans into his touch. Into the comfort offered.

"I know... I just don't want to with this." She admits after a moment, blinking back tears. Tsuyuko is so tired of crying. Her hormones should have leveled back out by now, she should be able to not be such a cry baby.

She's always been too emotive for a shinobi.

"Tsuyuko, what is it? Did something happen?" Shikaku keeps his voice steady, calm and collected. His hand on her back feels more grounding than he probably realizes. Tsuyuko takes a deep breath and shifts so she faces him.

Then she rips off the bandage as carefully as she can manage. Otherwise she's never going to be able to talk about it.

"I was pregnant during the last rotation. I'm not now." She tells him seriously, trying her hardest to not break into sobs again.

Shikaku's hand stills on her back, but he doesn't remove it. His expression shifts to one of thinly veiled sorrow, a soft frown tugging at his lips. Tsuyuko hates that she's caused him to make such a sad face.

"What happened?" He asks gently, his hand shifting to hold hers.

Tsuyuko has to take another deep breath, squashing down another bout of tears that rise in her throat before she can answer. Now she looks down, knowing it would be the only way to recount what happened without breaking into a million pieces. She couldn't bear to see what face he'd make about what she went through.

"An Iwa nin kicked me in the stomach, I suffered a placenta abruption which caused me to hemorrhage... the baby died upon impact. Sensei... he had to perform an emergency surgery to deliver.. it was a few weeks before you arrived at camp and why sensei benched me. I'm so sorry." She glances up just in time to see his brow shoot up.

"Why are you apologizing to me? I should be apologizing for putting you in that position in the first place, for not being there, for not realizing. Tsuyuko, what do you need from me?" Shikaku squeezes her hand, Tsuyuko bites her lip.

"Not to hate me for not realizing I was pregnant before it was too late." This time her voice does crack, she can't fathom a life where he hates her, where they don't end up together. Tsuyuko doesn't want this to be the end for them.

Shikaku doesn't let go of her hand as he scoots closer to cup her cheek with his free hand. Tsuyuko leans into his warm calloused hand on her face. Bringing her own free hand to hold it in place. Her future husband offers her a gentle reassuring smile before he opens his mouth to respond to what she said. "I could never. This isn't your fault. Okay, it's not your fault. I'm not mad at you, I could never be mad at you."

"I'm sorry." She all but mumbles into his hand on her cheek. Shikaku shakes his head.

“Don’t apologize. Please, it’s okay. I’m glad you told me, even if it’s horrible, I always want to know what happens to you.” His sincerity is nearly nauseating, it’s almost too good to be true, but Tsuyuko knows he’d never lie about something like this. Not to her.

“I wanted to tell you when you first arrived, but..” She manages after a moment of silence passes between them, removing her hand from holding his to her face to look away once more. Shikaku nods, seeming to understand the unspoken words, he rubs his thumb over her cheek one more time before reluctantly pulling his hand away.

“We’re still at war. I understand why you waited until I got home. Thank you for letting me focus on staying alive, however, let me focus on you now. Okay?” He does however squeeze the hand that he is still home firmly.

“Okay.” Tsuyuko looks up to find he is still wearing a soft sincere look. His smile is so gentle, so reassuring, it does a lot to soothe the ache in her chest. More than he probably realizes.

“Come here, if you want to, that is, let me hold you.” He doesn’t let go of her hand, but he does open his arm to her.

“Yes, please.” Tsuyuko nods, no hesitation and leans into his side only letting go to not twist his wrist. She rests her head on his shoulder, and he doesn’t hesitate to press a tender kiss into her crown.

“I love you.” He declares with soft words and not a shred of doubt, holding her close. She burrows her head further into his collar bone, closing her eyes as tears build once more.

“I love you too.” It takes a moment so she won’t sound on the verge of the abyss. Shikaku doesn’t point it out, he simply presses another kiss to her crown. He holds her close until the sun has fully lit the room and they can hear life about the home.

She’s not better, not by a long shot, but she’s better than she was before and that had to count for something.

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## Chapter End Notes

Merry Christmas to all those who celebrate! And to those who don't I hope you all have a great day! <3

*(Apologies for any typos/errors in the last few chapters- I've been writing on my phone instead of my computer ☐)*



# Signs of life..

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Orochimaru is in the middle of fixing coffee to prepare for what he thinks will be a long day when the front door opens. He can hear the sound of two sets of shoes being taken off and put aside. He doesn't have to glance up to see who it is when they round the coned, he is in fact very attuned to the commotion Tsuyuko makes when she comes home from anywhere. But he does, to be polite, to make sure she is in fact better than the last time he saw her.

He does not regret sending her home, even if he'd gotten an earful from Biwako about it. How was he supposed to know that Jiraiya was not currently in the village? That's not his fault. Besides he never intended for Tsuyuko to stay at the estate by herself, he knew she'd eventually end up with her future in-laws, and suspected that sensei would send Biwako to check on her. It was no secret that Tsuyuko and the Hokage's wife are close.

"Tadaima!" She all but yells as she rounds the corner. Her future husband is with her, and Orochimaru is willing to bet that she did tell him after all based on the way the Nara heir hovers. Good, he worried she might not.

But he's glad it seems she did.

"I can see that. Okaeri, Tsuyuko. Shikaku." He greets them both. Tsuyuko walks right over to him, completely uncaring of his coffee and throws her arms around him.

"Thank you." She whispers, digging her face into his chest. Orochimaru sighs but pats her head.

"We do not have to discuss it. Now, have you eaten breakfast?" He dismisses, truthfully not wanting to think about it this early in the morning. He still has the scroll containing the body for burial, it's weighed heavily in his pack over the last few weeks.

"Yes, we did. But I wouldn't be opposed to coffee." Tsuyuko makes a motion to steal the very cup from his hands as she lets go. Orochimaru rolls his eyes and lets her take it. He considers the mostly empty pot.

“Fine. The both of you? I will have to make more.” He turns walking back over to grab more beans.

“Yes, the both of us.” Tsuyuko chirps before taking a sip of his stolen mug. Orochimaru shakes his head.

“I suppose it will not be that much of a bother.” He intones blandly, already in the process of making another pot. Briefly he contemplates making more than he knows the three of them will drink, but decides against it, he has no idea when Minato will grace them with his presence and he’s not about to wake the teen.

“Yea, yea. Oh, I have a theory.” Tsuyuko takes a seat at the kitchen counter, resting her elbow on the table. Orochimaru glances up to consider that statement, to consider the somewhat dark look on her face.

“On what?” He asks, grabbing another mug for himself and one for the Nara heir. Perhaps he should start thinking of the boy as his future son-in-law... no.

Not yet. Potential candidate for his jounin commander, maybe. There is a part of him who would like to offer that role to Uchiha Fugaku, but that might ruffle far too many feathers. Save the Nara heir for Minato’s eventual Godaime-ship, he luckily has time to think about it.

“How non-lethally but very annoying poison the water supply that feeds the Iwa encampment that’s been the most irritating.” She answers easily, Orochimaru considers her expression. Tsuyuko’s non-lethal poisons would still leave a grown man in horrendous pain.

They would wish they were dead.

“Do tell.” Orochimaru walks over to join his apprentice and her partner at the kitchen counter. He sets one mug in front of Shikaku, it gets a quick thankful nod, and then he shifts his attention to fully be on Tsuyuko.

“Why non-lethally?” Shikaku asks after taking a sip when it’s clear that Tsuyuko isn’t ready to start explaining her theory just yet. She turns to look at her partner.

“Because further down the stream is a small village and I refuse to be responsible for the eradication of innocent civilians.” She tells them ever so seriously.

Orochimaru hums, he supposed that was in character for her. There was no way that Tsuyuko would want to be responsible for something of that magnitude after what she went through as a child.

“Understandable.” Shikaku nods his head, turning back to take another sip of coffee.

“Tell me about your theory Tsuyuko.” He all but commands, growing somewhat impatient with her stalling.

“Right, get this..” She begins and then goes off on a long tangent. Orochimaru nods along.

Yes... he could see how that would be ideal.

After discussing her current theory about how to get Iwa to stop setting up camp in that one valley, she feels a little better knowing that it might help, even if Orochimaru informs her that she will not personally be returning to a front line any time soon. Tsuyuko tries to protest, but he makes it clear that it's not really up for debate and then leaves. She stares at the spot he had just vanished from is a whirl of smoke.

“Has his shunshin always sounded like bells?” Shikaku asks as he sets down his now finished cup of coffee. Tsuyuko shrugs.

“I don't really pay attention to that. I always get distracted by how dangerous the smoke is.” She admits. Really though, that puff of smoke, the small cloud made when shinobi shunshined away was such a safety hazard. Shikaku huffs.

“Should have known. How has your training with your clan technique been going?”

“Eh, I haven't really been focusing on it. It acts more like a last resort fail safe and still only triggers when emotions are high. Sometimes. It's not very reliable, sadly.” She tells him, sitting back as Shikaku gets up to pour them both more coffee. Tsuyuko should probably talk to Suyuri about it, she might know more than the scrolls alluded to.

Or maybe she needs to actually read the scrolls. Eh... that still didn't appeal to her.

Shikaku sets her now full mug in front of her, he remains standing but leans against the counter. "Fair enough. Since we're going to get married, I could always show you shadow melding." Tsuyuko raises her brow at him.

"That's a clan secret." She points out. Shikaku shakes his head.

"Hmm, but eventually you'll be clan too. Okaasan was taught when she married Tousan." He points out almost lazily. Tsuyuko stares at him for a moment, now that he puts it like that, it should have been obvious. However..

"I thought Shiori-kaasan was already a Nara." At least she had assumed that to be the case. Shikaku nods.

"Very distantly, she wouldn't have been taught that technique. It typically kept the head family and a few branches. It's not like shadow possession which is inherent, it's more than that." He explains before taking a sip from his mug. Tsuyuko considers that for a moment, taking her time to answer.

"Interesting. If you think I should, if you want me to, then I would be happy to." She tells him, smiling softly. The idea of instantly being considered family is so heartwarming. Shikaku smiles at her no holds bar, his expression once again so utterly soft.

"I want you to." He answers with absolutely no hesitation. Tsuyuko nods, maintaining her soft smile.

It's settled then. She's going to learn his clan technique.

In war there are no winners, there is just who is left when the battlefield clears, when smoldering embers finally die, when smoke clears and ash seeps back into the earth. While a victor will be declared it is not actually because they have won something. Not really, not in compassion to everything that has been lost. In war, there are no winners, only those who are left behind. There is no justification for war.

Himura, in the over two years since his 'death' has had a lot of time to think about the system that they fight for. They are no more right than the next person. Their reasons are no more justifiable than their enemies. War is a loss for both sides no matter who wins.

He contemplates a lot, there isn't much to do pretending to be ROOT. It's amazing how easily fooled Shimura is when it comes to the entire ordeal. For a man who thought he knew best... he is arrogant. He is presumptuous. He is going to be so very very dead.

Himura stops, keeping himself concealed, melding into the wall. He's found what he was looking for.

He takes note of the location, the room number, the coordinates on his compass. He jots down everything he thinks will be useful in getting the wheel in motion. Including two names he thinks are of importance, *Nara*, *Tenzou* , he copies the files attached to those names with jutsu that the Nidaime created to include in his report. Anything and everything he thinks the Sandaime will need to finally draw back the curtain, to force into the light, and swing the executioner's blade.

Himura gathers every piece of intel he can. Especially everything on the little body in the vat. He knows they're the one that Tsuyuko would want to know about the most. The one she was most concerned about, what would become of him since it was no longer someone who knew more than the basics conducting these experiments. For now the vitals appear sound, alive. He can't believe it. This is the first time he's seen signs of life. They aren't just fragments of war.

*They're actually alive.*

Hiruzen one minute is staring at an empty desk and then the next there is a single scroll tied in a silver string. He sighs, well, it looked like he was not going home just yet. Carefully he grabs the scroll, placing a mild genjutsu over his desk before he opens it.

A single leaf falls out of the scroll.

They've found life. It was time to start the next phase of his plan.

Anticipation builds in his gut, to think, some six months or so from now... he will order one of his oldest friend's death. He sighs, there was nothing he could do about it now. They'd made this bed, all that was left was to lie in it. Hiruzen rolls the scroll leaf and all back up, he tucks it neatly into a storage seal inside his cloak.

He lets the genjutsu fall, standing from the desk, his back aches and his joints protests the sudden movement. This would be over soon, he

could step down, Orochimaru could see them to the end of the war and any following conflict once Danzo has been dealt with.

He would not leave that for him to deal with. This was his error, his blindside, his trash to take out. Once it was settled, he'd step away, everything should be in order then.

Hiruzen walks over to the window, the setting sun leaving a warm hue in the sky. He watches over the village from his window for a long moment. He was going to miss this view.

## Chapter End Notes

In which things are coming together :)

Thanks for reading!

<3

# Good enough...

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tsuyuko comes into the Sarutobi estate in a whirlwind, efficiently grabbing one Saruto Asuma by the back of his shirt as the boy tries to dash out of the house without his shoes on. He tries and fails to wiggle out of her grasp and Tsuyuko ignores his protest as she hauls him back into the house.

“Lemme go!! I have things to do! Unhand me!” Asuma bellows, flailing like a fish under her arm. Tsuyuko considers the child for a moment. So disrespectful.

“Hmmm... no. Good morning Asahi-kun. Biwako-sama, Hiruzen-sama.” Tsuyuko carries the academy student back over to the table and sets him down in his chair. Asuma huffs at her, crossing his arms over his chest rather petulantly. She ignores the behavior and reaches out to ruffle Sarutobi Asuhi’s hair, the now genin preens under the attention.

He’s such a cute kid, nearly identical to his future son.

“Thank you for catching Asume-kun, Tsuyuko-chan.” Biwako smiles at her, Tsuyuko nods, smiling softly at the hokage’s wife. She can never express how grateful she is for all this woman has done for her in now not one but two lives.

“No problem, apologies for dropping in unexpectedly, I got a summons?” She turns to regard the sandaime who seems to be done with his meal but slowly nursing a cup of coffee. Black, just like Orochimaru drank. Like sensei like student she guessed, except she would not be partaking in that trend.

“Yes, after breakfast, we will have tea in my home office. Have you eaten?” He tells her plainly, Tsuyuko nods.

“I had a go-bar, sensei was already gone.” She answers his question with a shrug, it is apparently not the right answer by the face he makes as he hums.

“I see.”

“That will not do, go, there is plenty please help yourself.” Biwako commands, and Tsuyuko knows better than to argue with her.

“Hai, Biwako-sama.”

Hiruzen seals his home office once the two have entered, he directs Tsuyuko to sit across from the desk. He himself leans against it, and quickly peruses the scroll that had been left on his desk earlier in the week. Silently he hands the scroll to his poison master. Tsuyuko opens it quietly, she inspects the leaf that falls out closely.

“Mokuton.” She whispers, keeping her eyes on the leaf.

“Yes, we have life.”

“How many?”

“A few, there is a report sealed further inside the scroll.” He tells her, Tsuyuko nods, unrolling the scroll further and unsealing said report quietly. Hiruzen says nothing as she reads through the documents her teammate had discovered.

Hiruzen, cannot say that he is unhappy with how that turn of events transpired, because having someone like Hyuga Himura on the inside of ROOT had been oh so very helpful. The chunin had made tons of discoveries that had further dug Danzo’s grave over the last few years. Discoveries that he could not ignore, and could not have fathomed ignoring in another life.

But he is not as old as he was then now. He is still the god of shinobi, still has his values to uphold and his people to protect. Even from people he used to think of as friends. Especially from people he used to call friends. There were no free passes now, no amount of water under the bridge that could save Danzo from his fate. Hiruzen is the judge, the jury and the prosecutor, and the sentence is clear.

Shimura Danzo must die. He will not stop until he is dead.

Tsuyuko covers her mouth as the report falls to her lap. She looks up at him after a moment. “Was he sure?”

“Unfortunately so.” Hiruzen confirms, keeping his tone soft and gentle. He knew that this was going to be a sore spot for Tsuyuko.



Knew what it would mean to her, to her future husband and family.

“My sister-in-law is alive? Shikaede is alive?” She reiterates, looking more heartbroken by the second. Hiruzen nods.

“I’m afraid so.”

“Bastard. And the boy, he’s so young.” She scowls, glaring at the scroll.

“Yes, he will need extensive care from the sounds of it once rescued.” Hiruzen crosses his arms over his chest pinning her with a look that he hopes she interpreted correctly. Tsuyuko looks up, looks at him sharply, she considers his face before taking a deep breath.

“Are you saying?” She asks, just about a whisper. Hiruzen nods.

“Yes. In a month's time or so, we will act then.”

“Okay. And you are sure that you still want me to..” She trails off, uncertainty clinging, Hiruzen finds her hesitation to poison him amusing.

“Yes, it will slow him down. I don’t mind being poisoned in the process.” He confirms, Tsuyuko sighs but nods.

“You’ll have an antidote, the poison I’ve created is slow acting.” She manages, Hiruzen waves off the explanation he knows is building. He won’t need it, he’ll have an antidote and Tsunade so he will survive.

“I trust your expertise Tsuyuko-kun.” He tells her firmly.

“Right.” Tsuyuko eyes him for a moment, clearly disbelieving.

“In the meantime, create a team, I fear it will be needed for the carnage we will find in those bases.” Hiruzen continues, not giving her another chance to doubt. Tsuyuko accepts the switch and nods carefully.

“Hai. I have a few people in mind.” She replies almost instantly. If he were a betting man, and he might be, he’s willing to wager who she picked.

He knows for certain that list will include Senju Nawaki who wasn’t as injured as everyone believed. Namikaze Minato who had been acting as their team’s third and was currently back from frontline rotation for at least another three months. The others would most likely be her

future husband, Inazuka Tsume, and probably Aburame Shibi.

“I suspected as much. Include Uchiha Fugaku, I know you made him aware of your team's mission... the eye belonged to his clansmen.” He refuses to give the Uchiha any reason to think this early on that the village does not consider them an integral part of Konoha, he would let them have justice for what was done to their clansmen.

While he has no reason to atone for actions he hasn't committed in this life, he will still hold himself accountable for the future choice another version made.

“He was on the list. Do you want to check off on it?” Tsuyuko questions, pulling him out of that train of thought. Hiruzen shakes his head.

“No, I will stand behind whoever else you pick.” Besides, he wants to see how right he was. Tsuyuko nods.

“Thank you sir.” She intones politely. Hiruzen rolls his eyes, standing straight and walking around his desk.

“Yes, yes. You are dismissed, Tsuyuko-kun.” He waves her off.

“As you wish Hiruzen-sama.” Tsuyuko bows before disappearing in shunshin, and it seems she still hasn't quite figured out her clan trick. Well it will come.

Hiruzen notes the report has been taken, but he hadn't asked for it back and he knows she needs it more now to prepare. For now he takes a seat at his home desk and drafts a letter. He trusts her to handle that end, now he must handle this one.

Tsuyuko pops into the Senju estate next, Nawaki is standing in the kitchen leaning absentmindedly on his crutch while something cooks on the stovetop. She walks over to him and hip checks him.

“Oh, hey.” He looks surprised to see her, which means he had not been paying attention to her arrival at all. Tsuyuko raises her brow at him.

“We got orders, come on.”

“My breakfast..” He whines, Tsuyuko considers the mush on the stove.. No, he would not be eating that. Besides, it was nearly lunchtime now. Must be nice to get to sleep in.

“I’m not letting you eat that. We can grab lunch on the way.”

“On the way where?” Nawakii questions, briefly she wonders if his time on the bench has dulled his cognitive abilities. Or if he’s always been this stupid.

“Home, now make haste, I don’t want to have to track Minato down and find him making faces at Kushina-san again.” She was scared for life. They’re cute together but she did not need to see... all of what she saw.

“Eww, gross.” Nawaki at least has the appropriate reaction to her plight. Tsuyuko nods along.

“Yes.”

“Fine, but let me clean this up first.”

“Sure, just be fast.” She mutters, stepping back to give him his space. Nawaki thankfully seems to understand that time is of the essence and quickly rinses out the pot and puts it in a full dishwasher and starts the load before walking back over to her.

“Right, let’s go.”

Once they’ve arrived back at the Yashaguro estate, just in time to catch Minato on his way out. He was only slightly put out to not go about his day but accepted being drugged to her room for deliberation without complaint. Tsuyuko hands the scroll she’d taken with her to Nawaki to read over first. While he reads she turns to face Minato.

“Himura is alive.” She says blunt, like ripping off a bandaid. Minato blinks, he seems completely unphased and then shrugs.

“I kinda figured, you were too calm about the whole thing.” It’s her turn to blink, what the fuck? Calm, he thought she was too calm? She was pretty rageful that entire time, she was beyond livid, of course he hadn’t seen her in the direct aftermath.

Maybe she was too calm a month later when they shared that deployment.

“Right. Moving on then, he’s been deep undercover since his ‘death’. I had a meeting with the Sandaime this morning and he’s discovered indisputable proof.” She mows forward, not going to stew on that admittance from her pseudo brother. Minato’s eyes widened.

“He found life?” He whispers, as if afraid to hope. Tsuyuko understands that feeling all too well. It was hard to hope, hard to think that there were survivors in all this. From the bodies found, the carnage they’ve already seen- to think that some people might come out alive, that they are alive now.. It’s almost too good to be true.

“He found life, but furthermore he found one success. A little boy a few years younger than my brother.” Tsuyuko informs them, trying her best to stay on topic.

“The one from your memories?” Minato asks, he doesn’t sit on her bed like Nawaki had, instead he paces in her room and fiddles with the knickknacks on her small vanity. Tsuyuko nods, eyeing Nawaki carefully as his expression just continues to sour the further down he gets in the report.

“Yes.. Tenzou.” She answers slowly.

“Are you fucking me?!” Nawaki exclaims looking up sharply and suddenly.

“Did you get to the park about Kaede?” She asks calmly, or as calm as she can considering her blood was still boiling.

“She’s alive?!” Minato sets down the knickknack in his hand loudly.

“Yea... she’s alive, for now that stays between the three of us.” She tells them, averting her eyes to look out the window. Tsuyuko knows neither will approve but..

“Aren’t you going to bring Shikaku in on this?” Nawaki sounds like he might protest.

“Yes, but... read the report in full. You’ll understand then why we need to wait.” Tsuyuko whispers, hating to keep this secret but knowing that it will only hinder their mission.

Shikaku and Shikaede were the closest of the Nara children, it was her

untimely and ultimately odd death circumstances that had broken him when they were all in the academy. Tsuyuko has no idea what her mental capacity is now, after years of captivity and being used as a... breeding mechanism for the more twisted experiments that Shimura had been conducting. She can't guarantee that the Kaede they find will be the same one they lost, can't guarantee that she'll be well enough to be moved, that she'll survive this. The scowl on Nawaki's face continues to grow and Minato plucks the report from his hands to look at it with his own eyes.

"Six babies.. Are they all?" He latches onto the part that she of course has been trying to not focus on.

"Kaede's, no they're not. They're two close in age to be, but not the same age to be multiples. It's likely there are others he has like her, or had. Or he just had them taken right after birth." She tells them seriously, trying hard not to rub her face. This was all starting to seriously stress her out.

It was too close to home right now, she's probably a bit too compromised, but she knows she is the only person who can deal with it. She's the only one who stands a chance of being able to stabilize these poor souls when the time comes.

"We get to kill him right?" Minato pipes up, he looks far too pleased by the idea. Tsuyuko grins, it's about the only good thing that's coming out of this shit show.

"Yes. He's not going to survive this. Speaking of, can you send a small frog and fetch Fugaku for me?" She probably should have grabbed him earlier, but eh, she was more focused making sure to catch Mianto.

"Sure. He's in on this?" Minato grabs a needle out of a jar to prick his thumb, Tsuyuko makes a mental note to clean and sanitize those later. She nods absentmindedly.

"On some of it. Shimura possesses a sharingan eye, I think it's best if we leave that to Fugaku to handle." She informs them both blandly.

"Sounds reasonable to me. Do you want the frog to give anything?" Minato nods, holding up a small toad for her consideration. Tsuyuko walks over and pats its head, the bright colored amphibians croaks at her.

"Yea, just lemme.." She reaches behind him to grab a piece of paper to

write a quick summary on it.

“Who else are you bringing into this?” Nawaki pipes up, Tsuyuko finishes scribbling her note before looking at him.

“Obviously Shikaku, Tsume, and Shibi- for search, rescue and recovery. Hiruzen will divide ANBU to each team as needed.” Or at least she’s assuming he will, she could only bring so many people into the fold before it became too suspicious. They still needed to play it safe.

“Still, is that going to be enough?” Minato asks when the note has been secured to the toad and the summons has been sent off to find Fugaku. Tsuyuko considers the question and shrugs.

“It has to be.”

## Chapter End Notes

Happy New Year!

< 3

from the looks of it, part 2 will be wrapping up over the next 4 or so chapters, and after that there will be a part 3- that should be considerably softer :)

Thanks for reading!

( ☺^U^☺ )

# And so it begins...

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Three and a half years after the war begins, the Sandaime calls for a large summit. It is the first large scale meeting of its kind but feels it is a necessity. This senselessness couldn't go on any longer. Sarutobi Hiruzen leaves the village with the sannin, who have no reason to suspect something larger at play because they are not pulled into the fold, leaving one disgruntled Hatake Sakumo in charge. But not before having tea one last time with Shimura Danzo, and leaving the sannin's apprentices with very clear instructions.

*Clean house .*

Tsuyuko, with the evidence collected over the last two years by Hyuga Himura gathers a team quickly and covertly. Each team consists of the few people she had pulled into the thread during the war, and a handful of ANBU who had been ordered by the sandaime to follow her orders. Tsuyuko herself takes three anbu and Nawaki to what she knows to be ground zero in all this. Himura is waiting for them at the entrance of the old bunker that was some ways outside of the village, but close enough that it wasn't an inconvenience to reach. It's a lab.

More specifically though, it's a graveyard. By reports she knows that Shimura started cleaning house as if he knew he was caught. The likelihood that they find anyone alive is slim. She tries not to lose hope, but also based on the scene before her she can't help but to think maybe it would be better if they were dead.

The atrocities that she can see, bodies suspended in tubes, fetuses in jars, random parts scattered about the place... it's a horrible sight, one that will surely feature in her memory for a long time to come. Nightmare fuel.

She orders the anbu with them to leave it for now, they'll come back and deal with this later. Himura goes ahead of them to do his own checks, to take out any lingering threats so they can focus on the mission.

"According to Himura's last report, Nara Shikaede is here somewhere. Shimura took her during the second war, he must have thought that

the shadow possession technique would be useful in helping create reciprocals for the Mokuton.” Tsuyuko tells them, Nawaki scowls like he'd rather not leave them and she wished they could be more delicate too but they didn't have much time before Shimura would realize something was wrong.

And she would need to be in her lab when that happened. “You heard her move, quickly. We have reason to believe that further in is where Nara Shikaede is being held.”

Tsuyuko doesn't tell the ANBU with them that where Shikaede is is where they'll find life, if they hadn't succumbed to their suffering yet. Tsuyuko grits her teeth and steals her nerves, she puts a very thick skin on, because no matter what happens this is going to hurt.

She can see no possible outcome where this doesn't break her.

Tsuyuko is quiet when they enter the designated lab. She is quiet when she slowly approaches Nara Shikaede, who sees her and sobs. She is quiet as she holds her fellow kunoichi for longer than they had time for. Her silence unnerves Nawaki to some degree. He is not used to her being this quiet. She pulls away from Shikaede and walks slowly over to the vat in the middle of the room.

There is a child suspended in it, he can't be older than four. Tsuyuko places her hand on the glass, and the child's eyes open.

“Tsuyuko?” He nudges her shoulder, Tsuyuko barely turns to look at him, her eyes far too focused on the vat to really pay him any mind.

“I'm alright. Get her out of here, take the babies..” To Dan, who'd been made aware right after the sannin left with the Sandaime. Nawaki nods, he watches the boy in the vat who regards them with curious if cold eyes. What horrors has this poor child seen.

“What about the boy?”

“Leave it to me. We're running out of time.” Tsuyuko whispers. Nawaki nods then pats her shoulder before turning back to the ANBU and the Nara woman. She looks ill, so very ill. This entire situation is so fucked up.

“Alright, you heard her. Move out, Nara-san, if it is agreeable I'll carry



you and the little one.” He doubts by how protective she’s holding what can only be a newborn a few days old that she’s letting go anytime soon. Not that Nawaki blames her.

“My daughter, make sure she...” She trails off, as if the words have escaped her. Nawaki nods, crouching down to gently scoop her up.

“I’ll keep you both safe. Mouse, Beaver, get the other cots, carefully.” He orders the two agents, who hesitate before snapping into action.

“Hai!”

“Tsuyuko?” Nawaki stands, he spares his teammate one more look but she doesn’t even glance at him.

“Go Nawa.” She orders, while climbing up the side of the vat. Nawaki hesitates, not wanting to leave her alone, but he has to. Tsuyuko can handle herself, right now he’s needed elsewhere.

Tsuyuko waits until the room is clear to peel the top off the vat, Himura puffs into existence next to her and silently helps haul the little boy out of the vat. Tenzou coughs, his body quivers and shakes horrendously, she activates an iryo-ninjutsu diagnostic technique to start accessing his physical form.

“This base has been cleared of all cockroaches.” Himura informs her blandly as he hops down first to help her down.

“Good. Were there any who could be turned?” Tsuyuko cradles Tenzou in her arms, his body too small, too frail for how old the notes claimed him to be. To be so cruel, to do something like this to other humans and for what..

“Not here.” Himura shakes his head. Tsuyuko nods, she shifts her focus back to the boy in her arms.

“Unfortunate.. Tenzou-kun, take a big deep breath for me. I’m using medical ninjutsu to clear the fluid from your lungs. Good, that’s good.”

“Who....are... you?” The little boy questions, coughing in between the words. Tsuyuko rubs his back slowly.

“I’m a doctor. I’m here to help you.” She keeps her tone soft, as steady

as she can manage. This poor child.

“No bad?”

“She’s good kid, the best ever.” Himura gruffs, resting his hand on Tenzou’s head, ruffling wet hair softly. Tsuyuko doesn’t feel like the best ever, she continues to heal the small infection in the boy’s lungs.

They need to move soon but she needs him to be a little more stable beforehand. She sits there, cradling Tenzou to her chest, rubbing small circles on his bare back for a few more minutes. Himura wordlessly finds something to cover the little boy in for when they move. It takes longer than she likes to feel comfortable moving him in this state, but they have to, Tsuyuko stands with Himura’s help, her grip on Tenzou never faltering. She holds him close and secure. Quickly they leave the way they came.

“Himura, go check in with Minato’s group and report back.” She orders once they are back on the surface.

“Of course.” Himura disappears in shunshin.

Tsuyuko takes a moment to take a deep breath, then she glances down at the child in her arms. Tenzou looks up through sleep riddle eyes. “I’m tired..”

“I know sweetie, let’s get you to the hospital, you can rest safely there and I’ll be able to take better care of your injuries there okay.”

“Mmkay.” Tenzou’s head drops, eyes shift close but he breathing remains as level as it can considering the partial pneumonia she discovered. Tsuyuko holds him tight and shunshin’s away from this awful graveyard.

Once closer to the village she wills shadows to wrap around them both like Shikaku had taught her and uses the Nara’s technique the rest of the way. It’s considerably faster, but it drains her stores significantly. Dan is thankfully waiting for her when she arrives, he looks as haggard as she feels.

“This is Tenzou, he needs an immediate round of penicillin and a warm bed.” Tsuyuko tells Dan, he nods, turning on his heel to shout over his shoulder.

“Itoka!” Her fellow medic appears next to them a second later. The slightly older girl takes one look at the boy and is stepping away

again.

“Another one?? Tsuyuko-sensei, are you alright?” She questions as she walks back over to the nurses station.

“I’m fine, just bring a gurney and get him up to the pediatric icu quickly. Tenzou-kun, this is my friend Itoka, she’s going to look after you for me. I have something else I have to do, but then I’ll be back okay.” Itoka grabs the gurney from behind the station, Tenzou gives her big wide eyes.

“Is she.. Safe?” He whispers.

“Very safe.” She promises. Itoka wheels the gurney over.

“Hospital is on immediate lockdown, with the exception of you no one is coming in or out. Now take these, go do whatever it is you still have to do and then get back here... those babies..” Dan helps her settle Tenzou on a rolling cart, the poor boy too weak to protest. Then he hands her a soldier pill and a chakra replenishment pill. Both are disgusting but taken quickly.

“I know Dan, I know. I’ll be back.” She promises, giving Tenzou’s hand one last squeeze before latching on to the snake she’d left with Fugaku.

Fugaku is mid-decapitation when she pops in next to him. Blood sprays over her face, and she ignores it going straight into fight mode. He doesn’t even spare her a glance as another ROOT agent aims for him, they end up being flayed alive. How terrible. Tsuyuko doesn’t spare the fallen traitors a second glance, between Fugaku, the two ANBU agents he had with him and Shikaku who she realizes is here with his own small team a second later, the remainders of this base are taken out efficiently.

“You have impeccable timing.” Fugaku informs her when it's apparent the fighting is over.

“Yea, maybe. How much more of this?” Tsuyuko shrugs, she certainly does not believe that notion in the slightest. If she had impeccable timing one of the reported six babies would have still been alive when they arrived for rescue. Not the cold little body they found instead.

“My team's location has been cleared, no survivors and more bodies of civilians were discovered. All dead.” Shikaku intones, she can see the mask her future husband wears clearly, but she refrains from calling it out. She knows she has her own mask on now too. Knows they all are.

They might have been trained killers, but there were sights that no one should have to see and they'd just been through hell itself.

“Good. It's been four hours since this started, hopefully...” Just then Minato pops into existence, with his own two ANBU and Himura. Nawaki must have gone to help Tsume and Shibi then. Good that was fine.

“We will discuss that later.” Fugaku intone blandly in regards to Himura's appearance. There wasn't enough time to disclose the entire situation to everyone, Tsuyuko had chosen to keep a few people out of the loop about Himura and even Nawaki until now. She'd deal with the consequences as they came. Himura ignores him, turning to face her.

“The other base was clear, however there were a few injuries so I sent them to the hospital with one of your keys.” He tells her, Tsuyuko hums. Not great, but not bad, injured, not dead, she'd take it.

“Who?” She asks quietly.

“Tsume and one of the ANBU agents. Not critical, but they aren't needed here now.” Himura tells her, walking over and handing her a rag for her face. Tsuyuko takes it and half-heartedly cleans her face.

“Good, the staff should be able to handle that quickly. Alright... time to lay the bait.” She turns to face the collective, Minato wordlessly steps over to join her.

“Are you sure he will come for you?” Fugaku questions carefully. Tsuyuko glances up at the cave wall. She nods.

“I just stole all his toys and killed his little army. He'll come. With sensei and the Sandaime gone, he won't be able to refuse the bait. Sakumo's time window is running out, we need to move.” Before the elders are released from the impromptu meeting that had been called in the absence of their leader. A farce, a smoke screen.

It wouldn't be long now, Shimura would be released from the meeting and he'd discovered the remains. He would come. His pride would allow for nothing else.

“If you are sure.” Fugaku concedes and she nods. Tsuyuko had no problem playing bait.

Minato’s hand clamps down on her shoulder, and without any more deliberation he pulls them through hiraishin. In an instance they are in her and Orochimaru’s lab, followed shortly by Shikaku who unfurls from a shadow, and then a few more seconds later Fugaku and Himura join them.

“Right. I’m willing to bet there are still more cockroaches in hiding. So Himura please go to the hospital as a guard. The rest of you can stay, but for now stay hidden.” Tsuyuko orders. Then she steps away from Minato and walks over to her work station. Himura confirms the order and vanishes in a puff, she does not bother to see how the others would hide themselves. Anticipation begins to build.

It wouldn’t be long now.

## Chapter End Notes

When I said things would happen quickly going forward I meant it lol

Originally I was going to include more of the planning process, but I could not get that written, it just fought me so I went a different way. I am still planning on including the conversation between Shikaku and Tsuyuko about her memories, but that is set to happen after this and was like that from the beginning. The next chapter will be the Danzo confrontation and more... i should have that chapter up today or tomorrow if all goes well :)

thanks for reading!

<3

# Snake in the grass, out of time..

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Orochimaru cannot say that he is pleased with the sudden turn of events, a kage summit, of all things, is a terrible idea. Surely Hiruzen-sensei knew better. Maybe his age really was starting to catch up to him.. He doesn't bother to hide his scowl as they walk. The Sandaime had insisted they walk part of the way, like old times, or something almost sentimental. Or senile. Hiruzen had been acting odd the entire time, was his age actually catching up to him?

Jiraiya and Tsunade bickering at the rear are certainly a reminder of old times. Hiruzen-sensei slowly pulling a flash out of his weapon's pouch is not.

"It's a little early in the day for a drink, sensei." He chides, his cowl deepening. If they were going to go along with this half thought plan he expected the old man to take it seriously. But Hiruzen smiles slyly.

"It's not that type of drink, Orochimaru-kun." He then proceeds to chug the entire thing.

"Sensei, what are you drinking?" Tsunade stalks over snatching the flask from his hands and sniffing it.

"I just told Orochimaru it was not what he thought it was."

"It smells medicinal." Jiraiya snatches the flask from Tsunade giving it his own sniff. Orochimaru eyes them both distastefully. Have they not evolved at all since adolescence?

"Yes, as it should, considering its medicine." Their sensei comments dryly, he seems far too amused than he should be. Orochimaru finds himself narrowing his eyes.

"Medicine for what? I haven't prescribed you anything." Tsunade sounds almost offended. Hiruzen chuckles, turning to keep walking.

"I would hope not, considering you're not the one whose poison I drank this morning during tea time." He says so flippantly, so blaise, and uncaring. Like he wants them to just drop it. But Orochimaru will not, he cannot.

“You had tea with Shimura Danzo before we set out. Are you saying that my student poisoned your tea?” He levels his master with a dark look, one that is not quite ignored but is waved off. Hiruzen just grins.

“To be fair to Tsuyuko-kun, I did drink it willingly. You should be quite proud of the poison master she has become, there was no trace of it at all. Not even upon check.” His sensei brags, and to some extent Orochimaru does feel pride for his student, for his daughter. But there is also the loud protective part that roars, danger, danger, as he looks into the face of his teacher.

“Sensei... why would you... no, you know, don’t you then.” The pieces start to click together. Orochimaru realizes now that much of what he’d been doing as Hokage training had been its own sort of disguise to keep him off battlefields during the first half of the war. Hiruzen’s expressions softens briefly and he nods.

“Yes, I do. I have for quite some time. You three think you can keep secrets from me, bah. I’m not that old yet. Come, we still have ways to go before we arrive at our destination.” Hiruzen tries to wave them forward but the three of them remain put.

“What is happening in the village right now Hiruzen-sensei?” Jiraiya asks, finding his voice in the face of this untimely reveal.

“Pest control. Now come along, we will only cause more issues if we return now. Trust that your students have it under control, Orochimaru. I do.” He says with finality that none of them can be ignored. Orochimaru sighs, he’s not giving up, but he will not make them late.

“This conversation isn’t over. You will tell us how we got here.” He says with his own finality. Hiruzen seems to consider him for a moment before nodding.

“Sure, now let's move.”

“Wait, let me check you first. Did you even drink that in the right time frame?”

“Tsuyuko-kun informed me I would have six hours to take the antidote or die. But if you must, Tsunade-chan.” Tsunade huffs at his answer, but nods her head.

“I must.” It delays them five more minutes, in which sensei tells them nothing else of what he meant by pest control and then they are on

their way again.

Orochimaru uses the walk to contemplate, he needs to figure out how long this plan has been in play and how the hell they missed it.

Hours later, it took four hours to weasel through everything, to start the process of getting them to the hospital, to clear all the graveyards, it is hours later when Tsuyuko is in her lab to deal with the problem. To be done with this once and for all. She sits at her lab station, not even a full five minutes later Shimura's infuriating chakra fills the room. He stands behind her, Tsuyuko does not spare him a glance as she wrings her hand in her lap.

After everything she'd just seen, with what she knows is about to happen to those poor little babies. To the sole surviving out of infancy little boy they'd found... she doesn't have an ounce of mercy to give him, he would not leave here alive.

The devil had run out of time.

"Where have you stolen my prize too, speak quickly before I just kill you girl." Shimura intones, with authority he doesn't have over her and Tsuyuko scoffs. His prize.

*His prize.*

People aren't prizes. Children aren't gambling pieces, they aren't prizes to be won.

"He was a baby, and you took him from his home, his family. and you injected him with a genetic code that you do not understand. He's not your prize, he's your victim." She comments coolly, hands still in her lap.

"The village cannot afford to lose the shodai's bloodline limit." He tells her like someone would to appease a child. But he's too impatient, too self important for it to work on her. She can hear his greed loud and clear. Tsuyuko is no child, she is not fooled.

"That was not your decision to make Shimura. Especially since you have no skill in this work, and have killed countless children in your endeavor to reach this self made pursuit." She barely spares him a glance, as she reaches forward to grab something off her desk.



“What is your point child?” He sneers, as if the insult is meant to affect her. Meant to make her feel inferior.

Tsuyuko turns in her lab chair, a single vile in hand, finally facing the elder who thought he would be able to intimidate her since Orochimaru and the others were out of the village.

Thought he would be able to threaten her.

As if she has not been planning for this moment for months, years even. The sannin were taking too long. Sure she understood their reasoning, sure she could see the logical side for waiting, but that understanding wasn't going to buy the devil any more time.

“Did you like the tea you drank this morning?” She questions, facial expression remaining the same flat neutral it has been the entire time.

“You poisoned me.” His realization is sudden, startled, it's the first sign of emotion she's seen from him. Shimura takes a stumbling step forward reaching for her, intent clear upon his face.

He won't be able to touch her. Minato's special kunai embeds into the hand reaching to kill her, pinning the elder to the work table. Her brother's hand still wrapped firm around the hilt. The shadow's edge around Shimura grows darker. Tsuyuko smiles a snake like grin.

Checkmate.

“I did, your problem is that you have become too complacent in your standings. Arrogant. You never expected the tea you shared with Hiruzen-sama to be laced, because despite his multitudes of warnings you still think he lacks backbone.” Arrogance is the largest factor in a shinobi's death. Complacency following just behind.

“I'll have your head for this, both of you. This is treason.” He growls, reaching for a weapon with the hand that should have been useless. Tsuyuko doesn't move, as blood splatters across her face. She eyes the sword through Shimura's covered eye, barely sparing Fugaku a glance, amusement finally winning over neutrality. Minato pulls his kunai out of the elder's hand, taking a step back.

“No, treason is what you were doing in back wood laboratories for the last five years. This... this is just clearing out rotted roots.” She intones with the same bored tone that she learned from Orochimaru. The blade retracts and Shimura's body falls forward.

Blood pools on the lab's floor. Tsuyuko stands from her chair, accepting the cloth Fugaku holds out for her once his blade has been cleaned and stowed. She turns to the darkest corner. Shikaku steps out from the depths of the darkest void.

"Is he dead?" He questions easily. Tsuyuko bends down to inspect the body. No pulse.

"He's dead, burn his corpse. I trust you boys can handle clean up here?" Because she needs to get to the hospital, Dan was good but she wasn't going to leave this to him to handle alone. Not with five infants who really needed technology that they didn't quite have yet.

"Get to the hospital, we can handle Shimura's body and any leftover ROOT agents." Minato tells her, not missing a beat. Shikaku and Fugaku nod their own confirmation. She trusts them to get it done.

Right now she has five babies, their potential mother, and one scared little boy to try and save. If Tsuyuko is honest with herself then by the end of the night it will be less. This was not a mess that would be easily taken care of, innocent lives would be lost.

Tsuyuko arrives just in time to haul into action, taking the chart for Tenzou out of Itoka's hand and ordering someone to go get Nawaki. The little boy is in the middle of some sort of panic attack that has sprouted roots and grass out of the floor. It would be cute if he weren't in bad condition from the pneumonia and toxic cells in his bloodstream.

If she were a fool she would have dragged out that bastard's death, but alas she knew better and wanted to end him before he could find some way to continue being a menace.

She doesn't tackle little Tenzou, that would be too much, but she does move quickly and efficiently until she can wrap her arms around him. "It's okay sweetie, it's okay. It's going to be okay."

"You came back."

"I came back. What happened?"

"She tried to inject something into my arm, you said she was safe, why did she try to hurt me!" He screams, a rage that only a broken

hearted betrayed little kid could manage. It's a rage she understands all too well.

"Oh sweetie, I know how it seems, Itoka wasn't intentionally trying to hurt you. The syringe is full of a medicine called penicillin. It helps fight infections, which your body is currently riddled with." She tells him carefully, gently, slowly, as kind as she can manage. Slowly the vines and bark, and leaves and tow retract back towards the little boy.

"But the needle, he ordered them to.." Tenzou rambles with wide frightful eyes. Tsuyuko nods, she should have accounted for that. That's her failing. She should have known the needle would give him a hard time.

"I'm sorry sweetie, I should have considered that when I gave the order for this type of medicine. Itoka, do we have the pill version of this on hand?" She turns her attention briefly behind her. Itoka nods, despite the blood dripping down the side of her temple she seems unphased by Tenzou's green meltdown.

"We should, I can go get it." Itako offers easily.

"I would appreciate that. Also, get Dan or someone to treat your forehead." She doesn't bark, but she does order. Itoka sighs.

"I hurt her?" Tenzou pipes up soundly utterly horrified with himself.

"It's okay kid, you didn't mean to, you were just protecting yourself. Besides, this little thing is the least of my problems." Itoka smiles kindly, Tsuyuko hums.

"Itoka was once bitten by a disoriented shinobi. She's tough."

"I.. I'm sorry." He manages, voice wobbling and tears beginning to build. Tsuyuko hugs him a little tighter. It's not his fault, he can't be held responsible for instincts yet.

"S'okay kid. I'll be back quickly, Tsuyuko-sensei." Itoka informs as she turns to go to the door.

"No rush, Tenzou-kun and I are okay for now." Tsuyuko tells her, gently scooping Tenzou up off the floor so she can return him to his bed. At that moment Nawaki appears in the doorway, moving out of the way so Itoka can leave.

“Did you call for me?” He asks, walking into the room not even bothering to pretend with the crutch anymore. Tsuyuko nods as she tucks the blankets back around Tenzou’s legs.

“Yes, go tell Dan that we need to do a bone marrow draw on you.” She orders, Nawaki makes a face but nods.

“Sure thing.”

“And someone get me the notes on the other patients brought in!” Tsuyuko yells into the hall, channeling her best impression of Tsunade. Nawaki laughs as he leaves the room.

She sighs, grabbing the chair that had been flung to the otherside of the room to take a much needed seat before Itoka returned. Tsuyuko stays with Tenzou until the other medic returns, and she can confirm that the medicine has been taken. Itoka hands the cup of water and canister of pills to her, then informs her she’ll go check in with Dan and make sure Nawaki’s bone marrow gets extracted in a timely manner.

“Right. Thank you Itoka.”

“No problem. Try to get some rest sweetie, it will be a big help.”

“I will.” Tenzou whispers, Itoka nods and leaves the room quickly. Tsuyuko once they are alone gently explains the medicine and what they expect it will do to Tenzou so he is informed and feels like he’s not being experimented on.

“Stay with me until I fall asleep?” He asks ever so sweetly, Tsuyuko squeezes his little hand.

“I will.” She’ll stay as long as she can, she can review patient files in here just as well as she can in the office or the lab.

## Chapter End Notes

I cannot believe that after all this time it finally has happened, this chapter has been mostly written for *months* so i’m very happy to get this finally !

thank you for reading!

# Nothing they can do.. Hope returns

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dan finds Tsuyuko hours after the air has settled from their ground zero. The young medic is hunched over her work bench, there is a cup of coffee that has long gone cold next to the jounin. He sighs walking over to her, he holds out the file in hand hating the news he has to deliver.

“Which one?” She doesn’t look up even as her pen stills. Tsuyuko doesn’t take the file, not yet at least.

“The younger twin. He stopped breathing, and there was nothing we could do to resuscitate him.” Nothing they could do, the words pierce the very thick skin she’d put on before all this had started.

Nothing they could do, no more help they could give, defeat. Utter defeat.

“Fuck, his stats had been the best for survival. Any update on Tenzou and Kaede?” She’d been stuck in the lab for the last hour looking at charts, comparing gene information, trying anything she can think of to save their lives. She’s hit a wall.

“They’re both still stable. Kaede we think has mastitis, and based on the DNA results the little girl and the eldest boy are both hers.” Dan tells her, grabbing the other stool to sit.

“That tracks, since they’re only nine months apart, which means Shimura kept her pregnant. Bastard. So then the twins and the other boy aren’t hers. Update on the eldest and the girl’s status?” She asks, hoping for an answer she knows the older man will not have. Dan’s face falls as if to prove her hypothesis correct.

“His prognosis doesn’t look good, his liver has started to fail.” Dan tells her gently. Tsuyuko contemplates banging her head on the table.

“No... we had a counter for that.” She mumbles helplessly.

“He’s not responding to treatment. His white count is down but it is fighting everything we try to give him.” Dan grabs the chart to show her. Tsuyuko takes it reluctantly.

“We’ve already lost two of the five Dan.” She snaps, not meaning to take her ire out on the doctor, but at least he’s fairly used to it. Dan sighs, he nods, paying her outburst no real mind.

“I know... Shimura didn’t know what he was doing, this isn’t your fault.”

“Yea... Is Kaede producing milk at all? It may help her remaining child.” If the ten month old is in acute liver failure and not responding to anything they had set up to counter then it's only a matter of time until the organs collapse. There is nothing they can do for him. Nothing. The helplessness of the situation is the worst part of it all.

He and Tsuyuko are both doctors on par with Tsunade, Tsuyuko is perhaps a better doctor than the sannin, and yet there is not a damn thing they can do to save these infants.

“She is, but can we ask that of her? In her state..” Dan sounds uncertain but doesn’t outright shoot her down. Tsuyuko shrugs.

“Seeing her baby may help offer some clarity, and worst case pumping will offer some relief to the swelling in her breast from the clogged duct. I’ll go talk to her.” Tsuyuko gathers a few things off her desk, the cold cup of coffee included. She’d need the mug if she were going to make another cup.

“Check on Tenzou while you’re up, he’s been asking for the nice lady who helped him in his moments of awakeness.”

“I’m not nice.” She denies, Dan rolls his eyes while crossing his arms over his chest.

“Yea, well, the kid doesn’t know that. Far as he’s concerned you’re the best thing ever.” The older doctor teases, Tsuyuko wished it were enough to bring some light to the situation.

But currently she doesn’t feel like the best ever. She feels all of nine again, with rivers of uncertainty dragging her out to sea.

“Huh, alright then. Check back in with the infants? Let the team know what we’re thinking about the little girl.” She asks, not wanting to step on toes, but knowing they’re all taking points from her. Dan smiles easily.

“Got it.”

Tsuyuko returns to the lab about two hours after she'd left, they've now lost three of the five infants that were rescued, her heart aches burning a pit in her chest. How was any of this fair?! Tenzou and Kaede were closer to stable than they had been upon arrival and the little girl she and Dan had first pegged as the weakest of the five is now the only one who looks like she'll survive the night. She sits at her bench pulling a file that she's long kept seal locked, for her eyes only.

They're missing something. Even now with all the notes she'd collected from the root labs. They're missing something. The treatment plan should be helping, or at least slowing down the spread - and yet... something is wrong.

"Hey." Nawaki opens the lab door slowly, the limp he's pretended to have been issue for the last few months now long gone. He walks over to her, strong purposeful steps, stepping into her space and wrapping his arms around her in an awkward angle hug. His sharp chin digs into her head, it would hurt if it wasn't cushioned by her own fluffy hair.

"Hey. How's Himura?" She hadn't seen her other teammate since before Fugaku skewered Shimura's face. Tsuyuko wondered where he'd gotten off too, but also was too busy to hunt him down herself.

"Tired, glad to not be undercover, he's been helping Ino. He's mad at you by the way." Nawaki informs her cheerily. She can only shrug at that news. Nothing new there.

"Inoichi? He can stay mad, that's not my problem right now." Or ever but she would keep that to herself, Nawaki nods.

"I figured you say that, he did too. He told me to tell you that you will be required to have a psych evaluation after this is all over." Tsuyuko scrunches her nose, that would also not be happening.

"Cool." She mutters non committedly.

"You okay?" Nawaki questions softly, Tsuyuko shakes her head no. She's not okay, not by any means of the word.

"We lost another baby." She whispers, hating to admit it outloud.

"Dan told me. I'm sorry." Nawaki's awkward angle hug tightens a bit,

Tsuyuko leans into her teammate.

“It’s not your fault. Shimura’s arrogance is what has killed these poor souls.” She tries to console him or herself. It doesn't matter, because it doesn't really make her feel any better. It changes nothing.

“Sakumo confirmed he was dead a bit ago. I don’t think he’s particularly happy with you either.” Nawaki tells her, and obvious question of why in his tone but she shrugs, she has no idea. Just that he hadn't been thrilled since this whole thing started.

He must have favored whatever plan he and the sannin had been conducting for the last few years over this. Or he was grumpy about having to play interim while the sannin and the Sandaime were out of the village. Either way it’s not her problem currently.

“He’s not but what’s new. He tried to come by earlier for whatever reason and Dan told him to fuck off. It was fantastic from what I heard.” Supposedly he wanted to ask her a few questions, to get the report in order but she was in surgery at the time.

“I bet. Anything I can do to help?” Nawaki asks, refocusing her attention. Tsuyuko shakes her head and bites her lip.

“Unless you can figure out what piece I’m missing then no. I don’t know what he did, but whatever it was it has nearly all but ensured that these babies are going to die.” She tells him solemnly.

“All of them?” Nawaki sounds so heartbroken by the prospect too, Tsuyuko hates it.

“The two left are the best off, and even then they’re not great. The remaining boy is entering late stage kidney failure and the little girl is malnourished. She’s burning through too much energy too fast.” And none of their treatments were working. It’s been hours, they should be showing new signs of progress. But as it stood there was no improvement to be found.

“That’s not great.” Nawaki mutters.

“No it’s not.”

“Shikaede and Tenzou?” He asks hopefully. Tsuyuko hums.

“Better off than the babies. Tenzou will likely recover in full, the malnutrition is going to take time to correct. But his body is no longer



fighting the cells after the few rounds of gene therapy we did with your cells to counter the virus the dead cells he'd been given caused. The pneumonia is still a problem, but it's easily treated." So long as he continues to respond to the antibiotic course they have him on then he should be okay. Tsuyuko would assume his full time care afterwards, trusting no one but herself with the little boy, but that wasn't important right now.

"That's good, glad it's helping. If I need to do another bone marrow thing for you I will." Nawaki offers easily without hesitation, she eyes the large wrap on his arm. She might have to take him up on that, but it would have to wait a few days... which they might not have.

"Thanks. I appreciate it. Kaede is... complicated. Physically outside of a mild case of blocked milk ducts she's fine, mentally on the other hand... she'll never return to combat. Not that I'd recommend it after everything she's been put through since we thought she died. Dan is better equipped for the mental aspects of things he's working with the psych department to devise the best treatment options for her. She'll be cleared to leave the hospital once the block clears and we get her fever under control." She hadn't been experimented on, not in the sense the babies and kids had been. At max she'd been forced through rounds of something similar to ivf against her will, based on the records they'd salvaged the little girl was her sixth baby. Meaning before this there were five others, including the little boy that they lost.

"Shame, she was always so kind. Where will she go?" Nawaki asks, absently petting her head. Tsuyuko considers the question briefly, the answer for that was easy.

"Home. Her mom has been here nearly the entire time." From what she was told, Shiori-san arrived as soon as Shikaku figured out the mystery patient was his older sister. Tsuyuko was dealing with another crisis in a different wing and had missed the entire thing.

She still hasn't seen him since earlier, between running back and forth from the lab to the pediatric wing, and back again. It's been miserable. She's so fucking tired.

"That's good. Do you want me to let go?" Nawaki seems to realize he's basically been using her as a head rest, Tsuyuko just shrugs.

"The hug is nice, your presence always helps me think. How are you?" She asks her own question. Nawaki yawns before answering.

“Tired. I feel a bit guilty feeling because of the deception but I understand why we did it. I’d do it again.” He tells her honestly, and Tsuyuko hopes he knows while the notion is appreciated she is not planning to ask this of him, of any of them ever again.

There should be no need for that now.

“I’ll take the fall for your false records. I’m sorry.” She mumbles, glancing down at the chart on her desk.

“Nothing to apologize for Tsuyuko. How are you?” He pokes her cheek. Tsuyuko doesn’t even pretend to try to bite him like she usually would.

“Tired. Frustrated that this entire situation is so fucked up. I knew, Nawaki, I knew... I just didn’t expect it would be this awful.” That terrible awful feeling of wanting to cry is back and she shoves it down hard. She could break when this was all over. She has to keep it together now. Nawaki gives her another big squeeze before he pulls away.

“Maybe some fresh air will help. Might help clear your head and think.” He suggests.

“I’m on call but a walk around outside won’t hurt. Stay with me please? I don’t know if ANBU won’t try anything once I step outside.” She holds up her pager to prove her point. The ANBU that had been entrusted to them were still around, but the ANBU who were taking orders from Sakumo who had not seemed pleased by the whole thing when he’d been given the brief rundown from the Sandaime early that morning-yesterday morning- might try something.

Not that she understood why, she was in fact acting on orders.

“I won’t let anything happen to you.” Nawaki promises without hesitation, and for the first time since he came to check on her she smiles, briefly, at him.

“You’re a good friend. Thank you for being mine.”

“You’re a good friend too.” Nawaki smiles easily back. Then he offers his hand to help her to her feet.

Tsuyuko wants to slam her face into a wall, she settles for pressing the palms of her hands into her eyes. Resisting the urge to just break down. All but one baby is left. In less than forty-eight hours she's lost four patients. Four babies, who still had so much life to live. For a moment she is no longer the jounin medic, prodigious poison master of her gen, she is just four year old Tsuyuko watching everyone in her home village succumb to plague. Dying for the sake of death. An utterly pointless fate.

Hopeless.

The office door opens slow and carefully, followed by the smell of freshly brewed coffee. Dan doesn't speak as he sets the cup on the desk. Tsuyuko doesn't remove her hands from her eyes. If she does, she knows that she'll start crying and she has no idea when the tears will stop.

"She's responding well to the new treatment, and Shikaede's mental state is starting to improve a little since we moved the baby into the room with her. You made a good call with this." Dan nudges a chart over for her to look at. Tsuyuko looks up to take note of the numbers and notes.

"Doesn't really feel like it... If we had known earlier.. We could have saved her brother." She mutters bitterly, before grabbing the mug to take a sip. It's dark outside, it's been dark for a while, she lost track of time around hour eight of this hellshow. Dan shakes his head, procuring another chart for her examination.

The coroner's report. Tsuyuko almost doesn't want to take it.

"The autopsy revealed that he had cancer in his pancreas, and was missing a good chunk of his small intestine. He was never going to make it, Tsuyuko." Dan tells her softly, Tsuyuko snatches the report from him to verify that.

***DAMNIT!***

"And the other three? What about them Dan! They were just babies..." She shouts, and then almost instantly has no fucking energy to give to be angry. This is exhausting. They should have acted sooner, it never should have come to this. Dan pats her shoulder.

"Shikaede wasn't their mother, the biological component wouldn't have helped them. You know that." He doesn't patronize, just states the facts calmly, Tsuyuko glances up from glaring at the coroner's

report to blankly stare at him.

"Knowing it doesn't make me feel any better, they're still dead Dan. We failed them." She grumbles, displeased by the entire situation.

"We did our best, you are the best doctor in this hospital." Dan shoots her down, crossing his arms over his chest. Tsuyuko blinks, she's not..

"Tsunade could have figured something out.." She mutters

"No.. I don't think she could have. It's true she's the best medic in the land of fire, but you, you will always be the better doctor. People die, we learn, and we do better next time." He soothes, Tsuyuko is glad he didn't meet his untimely end that they'd managed to save his life. She might not always see eye to eye with the man, but she appreciates his mentality. Appreciated his kindness, especially when she doesn't believe it herself.

"I hope there isn't another time of this shit." She says dryly. Dan nods, and gestures to the mug on her desk.

"Fair enough, drink your coffee before it gets cold. Go home for the night- I'll call if there are any changes with Shikaede and the little girl." Dan tells her, but she shakes her head. She's not going home, not to be alone and to be worried without direct access to her patients.

"I'm not going home, but I'll go camp out in Tenzo's room so he isn't alone." She counters, Dan doesn't look pleased.

"Nawaki is with him now, you need to go home, sleep in your own bed for a few hours. The sannin and lord third should be back soon." He tries, Tsuyuko waves him off taking a long slow sip of her coffee before answering.

"I don't want to be alone right now Dan. No matter how appealing my own bed sounds." She tells him. Dan sighs, he must decide it's not worth the fight and nods in defeat.

"Okay, I get it. I'll get a nurse to move another bed to Tenzou's room for you." He says this like he expects her to actually use the bed, Tsuyuko takes another sip from the mug.

"Thank you." She responds, actually meaning it, and he just nods.

"No problem."

Tsuyuko is not asleep when the door opens slowly, Shikaku filters in silently shutting the door behind him. Tenzou is asleep, his stats are much better than they were when he arrived, if they're lucky he'll be set to be released before the Sandaime is set to return. Shikaku walks over to her, Tsuyuko glances up from the chart she'd been reviewing to smile as best she can at him. "Hi."

"Are we adopting him?" Shikaku asks without prompting, and that's not really the first thing she expected him to ask. Tsuyuko bites her lip.

"I don't know what his prolonged prognosis is going to look like and since his case is so sensitive and I have the most experience with the mokuton from a science perspective.. I think it might be the best course." She explains, logically, it apparently is funny to her future husband cause he cracks a smile.

"I'm fine with that. Mom will be thrilled, she's been fretting over Kaede and my new niece this whole time." He tells her easily, no trace of malice or ill will that she kept Kaede a secret from him for over a month. Tsuyuko grabs his hand.

"I'm sorry.. That I didn't tell you." She apologizes, now the only thing she can do.

"About my sister or about your memories?" Shikaku hedges with a raised brow, he appears more amused than mad.

"Both.. who told you about the memories?" Tsuyuko blinks slowly. Well this was not how she was expecting her night to go at all.

"Himura, I'm not mad at either. I understand why you kept secrets. How are you?" Shikaku grabs the second chair and quietly pulls it over to sit with her. Tsuyuko doesn't hesitate to lean her head on his shoulder once he's settled.

"Exhausted. I'm so tired Shikaku. I knew.. I knew.. It was so much worse than what I knew." She answers his question, throat burning with a familiar pang. Shikaku wraps his arm around her and holds her as close as the chairs will allow.

"It's over now. Kaede and baby are set to come home in a few weeks, our kid will be released eventually and everything will go back to normal." He reassures, his calm soothing voice is enough to finally rip

through the thick skin she's put on before this all started. The reassurance that they were going to be okay, that it would be alright, is all she needed to hear it seemed.

Tsuyuko doesn't push back her tears then, she leans forward and sobs into her hands. Shikaku leans forward with her and rubs her back gently. She cries every tear she's wanted to since this started, she cries until her eyes are dry and her nose hurts.

"You good?" He questions softly when it's clear she's cried every tear she had to, Tsuyuko grabs a tissue and wipes her face.

"I will be, thank you." She smiles softly, Shikaku reaches forward and wipes a tear she must have missed away.

"No problem, try to rest. I'll keep an eye on our kid." He motions towards Tenzou's thankfully still sound asleep form. Tsuyuko nods, readjusts to lean back into him and rests her head on his shoulder once more.

It's not the best sleep ever, but it is the rest her body needed so she'll take it. She feels marginally better than she had. The anger is still there, the despair over the lives she couldn't save remain, but hope returns.

## Chapter End Notes

One more chapter to go for prt 2 :)

I'm so happy to be getting this chapter out today too, like i said in the last a/n i've had a lot of this written for months so it was just a matter of filling in the gaps

thank you all for reading!

<3

# Life goes on..

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tsuyuko spends the majority of the two weeks the Sandaime is gone, holed up in Tenzou's hospital room. The little boy's pneumonia fights hard and she refuses to leave now that everything else has been handled. Dan threatens to pull her off his case if she doesn't at least go home to shower on day five, and she only holds that against him for the hour she is gone from the hospital to refresh herself. Shikaku stays with Tenzou the whole time she's gone, which she appreciates more than she can express. It makes it easier to know that he's with someone she trusts explicitly.

When she returns, Shiori is apparently visiting. Her future mother-in-law smiles brightly at her. Warm and welcome.

"You look refreshed." Shiori says kindly, Tsuyuko nods.

"I feel it. How is Kaede? I'm sorry I haven't been by more to check in." She answers walking over to sit back in the chair she'd claimed as hers. Tenzou appears preoccupied by a small carved toy that was probably Shikaku's. Cute. Shiori smiles gently from her spot sitting on the foot of Tenzou's bed.

"You have your hands full here with this handsome young man. She is doing well, her fever has finally settled and little Kasumi is gaining decently now." Shiori informs them with a brilliant smile. Oh that's good.

"That's wonderful news. So...baby girl has a name now?" Tsuyuko can't help but to smile, she asks for clarification not wanting to assume. It would be nice to add a name to the baby girl's file though. Shiori nods.

"Yes, she decided this morning. Tsuyuko do you know if..." Her future mother in law trails off slowly as if she is afraid to ask. Tsuyuko hums, she pulls a mental image of Kasumi's chart in her head.

"If she'll have the mokuton? No, I can't say for certain right now. I've been looking at the breakdown of her cells and they currently appear normal, however, Nawaki's cells were normal until the gene activated. So I don't want to say she doesn't possess it either." The notes from

the lab were not very forthcoming about when in the process Shimura had the Shodai's cells injected into the baby's body. It's one of the reasons why this is so hard, his note taking, or who he employed to conduct these horrific experiments had no experience.

No real experience. So all the notes are mostly half trains of desired results and not the actual process or timeline. It's infuriating.

"I see. You've been very brave, I hope you know that. Shikao and I, we're very proud of you darling." Shiori responds with a kind warm smile. Tsuyuko's brain skips a track, and she blinks rapidly trying to process that.

"I.. Thank you. I'm just sorry I couldn't let you both know about Kaede when I found out." She glances down into her hands, not wanting to look. Shiori sighs and Tsuyuko can hear her get up from the bed and walk over. She looks up when the older woman stops in front of her.

"You did what you had to do in the face of an impossible situation. We do not hold that against you." Shiori leans down and pulls her into a quick hug. It was enough to make tears build up in the corner of her eyes.

"I'm grateful then." She manages to not actually cry, but it helps that Shikaku rests his hand on her back, a nice grounding presence. Shiori hums, she rubs her hand over Tsuyuko's cheek apparently wiping a stray tear away.

"None of that, now I'm about to head out but I'll try to stop by with some food for you all later. Maybe then we could discuss your wedding ceremony." Shiori pulls away and steps back. Shikaku groans and it gets a laugh from Tsuyuko.

"Okaasan.."

"Shikaku, these things take time to plan, let me be."

"Is now the time to start though?"

"It could be. Goodbye now. Tenzou-kun, I'll bring you a very yummy treat when I come back so be a good boy and listen to Tsuyuko and the rest of the medical team. Shikao cannot wait to show you the Nara forest and introduce you to the deer." Shiori walks back over to the bed, she gives Tenzou's head a quick pat, smiling softly at him.



“Okay.” He whispers, wide eyed, but he has a soft smile on his face.

“Bye Shiori-san.” Tsuyuko calls out.

Shiori waves at them from over her shoulder before leaving the room. Not long after Shiori has left, just long enough that Tenzou has drifted off for a nap, Kakashi appears with their mother. Tsuyuko waves hesitantly at Suyuri, who smiles pleasantly at her.

“Is Sakumo still upset with me?” She whispers, keeping her voice low to consider her sleeping kid. Suyuri shakes her head,

“No, his ire has shifted to the third. I told him he was being irrational and that seemed to get him to calm down.” Suyuri maintains a serene pleasant demeanor. Shikaku snorts next to her and he probably has a better mental image of what that actually translated to.

“Why was he even mad? Tsuyuko was following orders.” He asks as if the motivations of his own sensei escape him. Sakumk was a rather hard man to read though, so she doesn’t hold it against him. Tsuyuko was so similar to her own sensei that she usually could read him fairly well.

Unless he was trying to conceal his motives but that was different.

“Honestly Shikaku-kun I couldn’t say. Probably more mad that the Sandaime put her in this position in the first place.”

“But why?”

“Cause dad considers you his kid too. So.. nee-san, the kid?” Kakashi answers bluntly before he gestures loosely to where Tenzou is napping, a leaf stuck to his head. Has that grown there? She’ll check once they’ve left.

“This is Tenzou, I’m looking after him now. So be nice Kakashi-kun or I will be very sad.”

“Can’t have that I guess.” Kakashi mutters sarcastically, Tsuyuko grabs him by the back of his shirt once he’s gotten close enough to her.

“You brat, come here. You think you’re tough because you’re an academy student now...” She pulls him into her lap and ruffles his hair. Kakashi tries to get away.

“Eww gross you smell like the hospital.” He declares, more like

whines but eh. Tsuyuko smirks at her brother.

“No I don’t, I went home and showered this morning.” She tells him blandly which prompts her brother to turn around and actually smell her. Dog people.

“Fine, you don’t smell like the hospital.” He concedes, still looking suspiciously at her.

“Thank you. So, what brings you both by? Not that I’m not happy to see my baby brother.” She asks, setting Kakashi down. He stays close by.

“Just wanted to check in on you. Okaasan was worried, she says you haven’t been sleeping.” He informs her bluntly, Tsuyuko glances up to confirm that her bio mother, the Hatake matron nods her head.

“I didn’t mean to worry you Suyuri-san.” She apologizes quickly, not really liking the way this interaction makes her feel. Seeing Suyuri is still hard sometimes, especially after the last few months.

Biwako had told her that she’d been there to help in the aftermath of Tsuyuko losing her baby, but her memories are hazy and while she appreciated the kindness. It doesn’t change how she feels.

“It’s fine, I just needed to lay my eyes on you both at the same time.” Suyuri answers easily, Tsuyuko sighs.

“I get it. You were with Shikaku’s team right?”

“I was.”

“Thank you for helping us.” While she may have her difficulties, she did mean that.

“It was no trouble, I’m just glad it worked out the way you and the Sandaime had planned.” Suyuri remains calm and cordial, Tsuyuko tries her best to let the weirdness go. Except she just can’t.

“Yes... me too. I’m sorry this is..” But of course Tsuyuko still has her limits and it’s been several long days. Suyuri nods, smiling softly albeit sadly.

“I understand, thank you for indulging me for a moment. Come on Kakashi-kun we have one more errand to run.” She waves her son over. Kakashi visibly deflates but nods before giving Tsuyuko one

more long look over.

“Bye nee-san, get some rest, you look terrible.” Her baby brother quips, giving her a quick hug before skating over to his mother.

“I miss the days when you were just a baby and didn’t say everything you thought.” Tsuyuko grumbles playfully back, it gets a smirk from the little boy.

“Bye, love you.” He grins, taking his mothers hand leading her back out of the room.

“Love you too you brat.” Tsuyuko calls out before the door shuts and then turns to regard Shikaku.

“That was nice.” He comments idly. Tsuyuko hums.

“Yea, still weird though.” She mumbles.

“Fair enough. You gonna take a nap? Kakashi-kun had a point, you look tired.” Shikaku points out, Tsuyuko shrugs, she knows how she looks.

“I feel tired. But, sleep is hard.”

“Do you want me to see if you can get something to help?” He offers. Tsuyuko shakes her head.

“Nah, I’ll be alright. I’m not on call, so I’m just going to hang out here. Do you have anywhere you need to be?”

“No, I gave my statement to Fugaku when he decided that he’d assume responsibility for the paperwork.” Shikaku tells her, dry amusement dancing on his tongue. Tsuyuko smiles, briefly, that was nice of Fugaku.

“Remind me to send him some very nice flowers.” Because she is sure the paperwork for all of this is an absolute nightmare. She’s busy with her own type of paperwork too, but it might actually be more depressing.

“Sure. Inoichi wants me to remind you that he thinks you need a psych evaluation.” Shikaku seems like he would rather not be the one to tell her that. Tsuyuko shakes her head, leaning back in the uncomfortable hospital chair.

“Hmmm.. no. If I need one I’ll talk to Dan.”

“That’s what I told him. But you know how he is.” Shikaku draws lazily with a shrug, he obviously didn’t seem to think she needed a psych eval. Tsuyuko hums.

“Annoying. I’ll appreciate his concern later I’m sure, right now it’s just annoying.” She mutters.

“He means well.” He tells her gently. She nods, leaning her head on his shoulder.

“I know. Now, sshh, I’m going to close my eyes and pretend to sleep for five minutes.”

“Yeah, yea.”

The Sandaime and sannin’s return is a highly anticipated day. Of course for Tsuyuko that means she caught up with pathology at the hospital on the day and completely misses the immediate drama that unfolds. When Minato is recounting the whole thing later she decides she was glad she wasn’t a part of it.

“One of the small council members said you acted out of turn.” He tells her between bites of takeout. She was still at the hospital and he’d been kind enough to bring her dinner. Such a good older brother.

“Cool, they’re so dumb. Can’t wait for sensei to fire them when he becomes Hokage.” She mumbles, between bites of rice, Minato snorts.

“He did. Hiruzen-sama said that Orochimaru could handle what little scimmages popped up in the face of waiting for this treaty to be signed and stepped down.” He tells her, somewhat flippantly, meaning there was more to that story. Tsuyuko sets her takeout box down to stare at him.

“Wait, what the hell?”

“Yea, they’re gonna make an announcement about it sometime next week.” He informs her, taking another bite of his own food. Tsuyuko stares at her rice for a moment.

“Huh.”

“Yeah, then Hiruzen-sama basically told the room that you were

operating under his order and anyone who said otherwise would be charged with treason.” Minato continues, Tsuyuko blinks slowly.

“Fascinating.” She manages dryly after a moment.

“It was kinda funny to watch.” Minato grins, Tsuyuko glances back at him then, brow raised.

“How’d you manage that?” He shrugs at her question.

“Honestly bad luck. I was just trying to grab a report form.” He answers, closing off his takeout box that he’s apparently devoured in the last five seconds while she wasn’t looking at him. Boys, she’ll never understand their ability to make food just vanish.

“Oof. Did you at least get your form?” She questions, because if she had to be subject to all of that she would hope to come away with what she actually came for. He nods, smiling happily.

“Yes, thankfully. What are you doing anyway?” He gestures to the charts open to her side, charts that she’d been reviewing when he came in with food.

“Running labs. Comparing progress.”

“Interesting.” He responds accordingly, a hint of sarcasm, a dab of genuine interest. Tsuyuko rolls her eyes.

“It’s boring, but I’ll take it cause my patients are getting better.” She’d rather have boring labs than labs that promised no good things.

“Nothing wrong with being boring. Are you going to come home tonight now that sensei and Orochimaru are back?” Minato paces behind her, Tsuyuko far too used to it ignores it, she considers his question.

She hasn’t been home, longer than to take a shower since this entire thing started. Originally it was because she didn’t want to be there alone, but now she felt like she couldn’t leave until Tenzou is released. Her poor little boy isn’t as better she hoped he would be by now. The infection in his cells, in his lungs, was fighting a lot harder than she expected, coping up with problems at night. It was frustrating.

“Probably not. Tenzou still isn’t ready to be released and I don’t want him to be alone at night yet. That tends to be when his symptoms act up.” She tells Minato plainly, no point lying. Minato nods, accepting

her answer for what it was.

“Do you want me to bring anything here for you then?” He asks without hesitation. Tsuyuko has always appreciated his desire to be helpful when he could. Minato was such a kind person, even if he was an absolute maniac when it came to the battlefield. She shakes her head.

“I’m alright. Shikaku stopped by the house earlier and made me an overnight bag. He’s dealing with clan stuff now, but will be back later.” So she won’t be alone, Minato nods.

“Good deal then. I’ll let you get back to your work.”

“Thanks for bringing me food Minato.” Food that she would finish later

“No problem!” Minato cheers as he starts to walk away, she shakes her head. He’s so ridiculous.

Now to get back to her work.

It is two whole days before Tsuyuko sees her sensei, apparently he was caught up with the bureaucratic side of things and the what should be obvious headache of assuming leadership of an entire village overnight. Especially in the wake of what had happened, Shimura is outed, post-mortem as a traitor for reasons non disclosed but his name is not added to the memorial stone, there is no funeral, no service. His entire existence is swept under the rug, with the only acknowledgement one made to the council of clan heads and the brief announcement the Sandaime gives. Tsuyuko thinks he deserved a lot worse, but alas it is not up to her, and frankly she’s ready to put his existence behind her.

He’s dead. They get to go into a new daw without his horrible shadow looming over them.

Tsuyuko has no idea what transpired at the Kage summit, she does not ask, frankly it’s not her business. If it became imperative that she knew, someone would tell her. Until then she continues about her business as usual. On the second day after their return she is able to release Shikaede and Kasumi, Tenzou’s fever was back at it again that morning so he was waylaid another day or so.

Meaning Tsuyuko was still hanging out at the hospital in the meantime.

By the third day after her sensei's return he must get tired of her not showing up at home and tracks her down. Or at least by the expression he is making, that's what she is theorizing what happened. He sighs stepping into Tenzou's room mindful of the sleeping boy as he shuts the door, Tsuyuko bites her lip, she won't lie she is nervous about how this is going to go down.

"Tsuyuko-chan, are you avoiding me?" Orochimaru cuts right to it, she glances away which should be an answer in itself. Avoiding is such a strong word, she'd prefer if they referred to it as tactical distance.

She's scared he's going to be upset with her, and she doesn't really want to deal with that right now.

"Maybe a little. Are you mad?" She whispers, glancing out the window. This room had such a good view of the sky. Orochimaru sighs and pulls a chair over to sit down across from her.

"That you're avoiding me? Or that you went behind my back with this?" He asks ever so dryly, Tsuyuko bites the inside of her cheek and shrugs.

"Either, both, I don't know." She keeps her voice quiet, not wanting to wake Tenzou, he needs all the rest he can get.

"I am not mad with you. I unfortunately understand why everything transpired the way it did. You have always been one for the fine details." His tone remains a flat neutral that she knew all too well, Tsuyuko finally looks away from the window to meet his gaze.

"I'm sorry, I wanted to tell you, there were so many times I wanted to tell you... but if it went wrong I couldn't risk putting you in that position." She wrings her hands in the blanket draped over her lap. It might have been silly, because he was her teacher, he was supposed to protect her, but.. She couldn't imagine a life without him there, if he became evil because of Shimura, or if the council had tried to pin something on him because of her..

She just couldn't let that happen. Orochimaru sighs.

"While I appreciate the thought, I am still your teacher. You shouldn't have had to worry about what would happen to me." He tells her

firmly, meaning he will hear nothing else of this reason. Tsuyuko hesitates but nods.

“Sorry Chichi..” She looks him straight on, meaning it. While she would probably do this all the same if that were to happen, she is still sorry that it has upset him. Orochimaru reaches forward and lets his hand sit on her head.

“Apology accepted Tsuyuko-chan. Now, I would like to hear your version of how this all panned out.” He leans back after a moment, getting comfortable in the chair as if he knows it will be a long story.

“Okay, if you are sure.” She readjusts her own position, checking the monitors on Tenzou first before getting comfortable. Orochimaru hums, catching her attention before she can think of the best way to explain her thought process.

“I am. And Tsuyuko-chan, I am proud of you. Despite my displeasure over how this has all gone down, you did well. You should be proud of yourself.” He offers her a quick soft grin. Tsuyuko beams under the praise from her father.

She smiles brightly, for the first time in what felt like a long time. Everything was going to work out the way it needed to.

## Chapter End Notes

The end <3

I will work on getting prt 3 out as soon as I can! It's going to be a much softer tone, including things like the ShikakuxTsuyuko wedding, the eventual arrival of the konoha 11, and my favorite Orochimaru in his grandpa era lol

thank you all so much for reading!  
<3

Also this fic and my other naruto fics now has a discord server if anyone wants to stop in, the server is adults only but thats more for my comfort than anything else :)

[My Naruto OC and Works Server](#)



## End Notes

Woop woop! Venom part 2 is officially up! I hope you all enjoyed the chapter <3 I will work on adding more tags and stuff as time goes on but it will suffice for now

updates are slow going for the time being, but I will do my best to get them posted as soon as they are ready

thank you all for reading <3

:) have a great day!!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!